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George Brewster

GEORGE MEREDITH

HIS LIFE AND FRIENDS IN RELATION TO HIS WORK

BY

S. M. ELLIS

WITH FORTY-ONE ILLUSTRATIONS

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George Meredith; his life and friends in 1920.

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PREFACE

I WISH to thank the Duchess of Rutland, the artist, and Colonel J. G. Adami, A.D.M.S., the owner, of the fine pencil portrait of Meredith, which by their permission is reproduced in this work: the original drawing, I understand, is to find a place in the Art Gallery at Montreal. To the late Mr F. J. Williamson, the sculptor, I was greatly indebted for the contemporary photographs of Esher and Copsham as in Meredith's time.

For the loan of other illustrations, or help in many ways, I thank Mr A. St John Adcock, Mrs Banks, Mr F. B. Barwell, Mr Reginald Blunt, Mr G. Buckston Browne, Miss Hilda Chester, Mrs Clarke, Mr Herbert Cook (of Copseham), Mrs Arthur Croome, Mr A. T. Everitt, Mr J. J. Freeman, Mr H. M. Hyndman, the Rev. Dr F. J. Foakes Jackson, Mrs Frederick Jones (of Kingston Lodge), Mr J. Brooke Little, Mr L. J. Maxse, Mr A. Gordon Pollock, Miss Ella Pycroft, Mr Lionel Robinson, Mrs Ross, Miss de St Croix, Mr C. K. Shorter, the Lord Sterndale, Miss Tupper, the Rev. W. B. Vaillant, Mrs Woolf, Mr A. N. Bonaparte Wyse, and Mr and Mrs Ralph Wood (who so admirably preserve the amenities of Flint Cottage, Box Hill).

Mr G. A. Rossetti courteously gives me permission to quote from his father's book on D. G. Rossetti; Mr Wilfrid Scawen Blunt from *My Diaries*; Mr

J. A. Hammerton from *George Meredith in Anecdote and Criticism*; and Mr Thomas Hardy, O.M., kindly allows me to use his poem, *George Meredith.*

S. M. Ellis.

Kew Gardens,
March, 1920.

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CHAPTER I

GEORGE MEREDITH'S BIRTHPLACE: PORTSMOUTH. THE MEREDITH FAMILY

DURING his lifetime an impenetrable veil of reticence, and, in consequence, of mystery also, hid the facts of George Meredith's origin and family history and his own early days from public knowledge. The world has a pardonable weakness for desiring to learn the personal details of a great man's life, and gratification is generally supplied freely, in full measure and unasked, by the subject himself: but in this case there was no information forthcoming either from Meredith or his friends. He had arrived in London a friendless youth, and the friends he began to make then, and all those through the subsequent years, were told nothing definite about his parentage or whence he came. In later days the contemporary books of reference, such as *Men of the Time* and *Who's Who*, merely stated he was born in Hampshire, and made no allusion to his family. Various authors who produced appreciations of Meredith during his lifetime shied as they neared the danger zone of his origin, and slid warily over their thin ice with a few words of polite nebulosity. Mr Edward Clodd has related [1] that when he was filling in a census paper for Meredith, and the place of birth had to be mentioned, he was told to put "near Petersfield": as a matter of fact, Meredith

[1] *The Fortnightly Review*, July, 1909.

was born some twenty miles distant from that town. In the obituary notice of Meredith in *The Daily Telegraph* the novelist was stated to have been born at Winchester. It is needless to labour the point that it was not until some time after his death that it became publicly known that Portsmouth was his birthplace.

The reasons for all this mysterious reticence are very difficult to fathom. That it was entirely owing to a desire to hide the fact that his father and grandfather were naval outfitters or tailors I decline to believe.[1] No man of a sane mind—to say nothing of one of vast intellect—could attach shame to the knowledge that his immediate ancestors had followed an honest trade. Both his father and grandfather were uncommon men, quite unlike the provincial tradesmen of their time ; and the fact that Meredith recounted many incidents of their lives, and used actual names, in his family history of *Evan Harrington*, refutes the theory that he was literally ashamed of the tailor's shop, which he proclaimed, and eventually immortalised, to all the world. No ; although disliking his origin, the cause of his reticence must be attributed to some deeper source—an abnormally acute sensitiveness of mind which strove to put aside and forget the memories of old, unhappy things. For his own personal experiences in early days were unhappy. "In youth I looked out under a hail of blows," he said metaphorically. His unhappiness, as I shall hope to demonstrate presently, was mainly caused by his own temperament and uncongenial surroundings : the boyhood of a genius

[1] On the other side it can be advanced that Mr Wilfrid Scawen Blunt states, on the authority of Mr Wilfrid Meynell, that the fact of Meredith's "tailoring parentage was the secret trouble of his life."

is not often appreciated by his family. The point I am trying to establish now is that Meredith, having carved his own career and made his fame, unaided and alone, regarded his early life only with bitterness and pain; and, perhaps by some twist of unkindly thought, he was unwilling that any portion of his abilities should be attributed to the influence, or training, of those who, as he imagined, treated him unsympathetically in youth. He used to say: "When I was young, had there been given me a little sunshine of encouragement, what an impetus to better work would have been mine." The fact may be granted at once that he owed very little to immediate heredity and so-called education for the upspringing of his literary gift. His genius was innate, and able to hew its own way to consummation. He was certainly the most amazing product that ever came out of a provincial shop, but this was merely a freak of Fate. His birthplace, though of great interest for biographical reasons, is immaterial in tracing the intellectual development and expression of his mind and rare personality.

Whatever the causes that prompted Meredith's reticence on the subject of his origin, he was singularly ill-advised in preserving that silence to the end; for the sake of his mother's reputation he should, presumably, have refuted the absurd rumours—if they ever reached his ears—that were current about his paternity. For, baulked of any authentic information, public curiosity was titillated, and speculation rife as to the causes or necessities for this strange and mysterious reserve. Consequently, legends arose—a varied assortment, whose only point of agreement consisted in assigning to Meredith high-born but illicit paternity. He was

a son of George IV., or, more probably, of the sailor prince, the Duke of Clarence (William IV.), or at any rate of some aristocratic and amorous admiral ashore. He was a son of Bulwer Lytton, and here the evidence was conclusive: Bulwer Lytton's son, Robert, subsequently the first Earl of Lytton, had adopted the literary pseudonym of "Owen Meredith," and so it followed, as the night the day, that George Meredith must be his brother. Most general of all was the suggestion that he was of "noble Welsh descent"; perhaps he was, very remotely, but there is no evidence.[1] For three generations, at least, his immediate ancestors were Hampshire people; and it was mainly to dispel the ridiculous rumours mentioned above that I was constrained, originally, to make known the real facts of Meredith's parentage; to point out, for the first time, how much of his family history had been adapted to the story of *Evan Harrington*; and to relate the history of his own early days in Portsmouth.

In addition to Meredith, Portsmouth was the birthplace of Charles Dickens (in 1812) and of Walter Besant (in 1836), and it is curious that their interesting and historic native town does not appear more frequently as the locale or background of their novels, though it is the case that each of these three writers has dealt with the place in at least one of his books. Besant, in *By Celia's Arbour*, approaches most nearly to what would be expected from a literary son of Portsmouth. In the case of Dickens, his impressions of Portsmouth were faint, of course,

[1] Possibly this rumour had its origin in a remark Meredith places in a letter of the Countess de Saldar's in *Evan Harrington*, where, alluding to the Great Mel., she says, had he been *legitimitized*, he would have been a nobleman.

for he was removed from the town in early childhood; but nevertheless he retained some recollections of its topography—or refreshed his memory on the subject—because, in *Nicholas Nickleby*, Mr Crummles and his theatrical company are conveniently lodged in St Thomas's Street and Lombard Street, close by the old theatre. Meredith, who remained in his birthplace until he was about thirteen or fourteen, in *Evan Harrington* depicted various scenes at the paternal and grand-paternal shop in Portsmouth, here thinly disguised as "Lymport"; but, apart from its biographical interest, the novel is subjective rather than objective, and the situation of the tailor's shop, and the incidents that happen there, could equally well be placed in any other town without much loss of pictorial transcription: the book is no picture of Portsmouth, the real Portsmouth, with all its stirring naval interests.

Although Portsmouth failed to inspire her two most famous sons, the old seaport has no lack of history and romance (of all periods), for its record runs concurrently with that of civilisation in England. The Romans perceived the advantages of this great inlet of the sea, and established a settlement on the northern side, at Portchester. When the sea receded from here the inhabitants migrated a little way south and founded Portsmouth, which is mentioned as a landing-place in *The Saxon Chronicle*, A.D. 501. By the time of Henry I. the place was of importance. Both Robert of Normandy and the Empress Matilda landed here on their aggressive expeditions to claim the Crown. Portsmouth became a naval station in the reign of John; strong fortifications were added in succeeding reigns, and completed in that of Henry VII.; and during

the time of Henry VIII. the port became the principal station of the English Navy, a position it has ever since retained. Tragedy and romance were mingled here in Stuart days, when the Duke of Buckingham was assassinated at a house in the High Street, and Charles II. was married to Catherine of Braganza in the chapel of the hospital of Domus Dei (now the Garrison Church). In the eighteenth century, and for the first part of the nineteenth, Portsmouth attained its highest renown, during the long American and Napoleonic Wars, when there was ceaseless naval activity, and the presence of great sailors (now historic names) an everyday occurrence. Portsea (which includes the Dockyard), Gosport, and Landport, were of later origin than Portsmouth proper, but all these neighbouring townships assumed the distinctive " port " in their nomenclature, and to-day form one great town, popularly known as Portsmouth—though the actual ancient place covers no more than one hundred and ten acres, and up to the middle of the last century kept severely aloof from its suburban offspring behind armed fortifications, moats, and defensive gates.

How it came about that the ancestors of George Meredith migrated from Wales to Portsmouth will now never be known. Judging by the name, the family certainly was of Celtic origin, and, characteristic of that race both in Ireland and Wales, the Merediths preserved a vague tradition of princely progenitors quite in the style of The Mulligan. George Meredith alludes to this amiable weakness of his relatives in *Evan Harrington*, where he says Melchisedec was mysterious concerning his origin; and, when drinking, talked freely of a great Welsh family, issuing from a line of princes. And again,

when the Countess de Saldar asks: Were we Glamorganshire Tudors, according to Papa? Or only Powys chieftains? Alack! These pleasing speculations are as nebulous as an aerial Spanish—or should it be Welsh?—castle, for the Merediths of Hampshire had no princely possessions and appanages beyond great beauty and distinguished carriage, and a glorious prodigality in money matters.

The first of the name, the novelist's great-grandfather, John Meredith, is merely a name. He apparently lived at Portsea in the middle of the eighteenth century, for his son was baptized in the parish church there, St Mary Kingston, in June, 1763. This son, Melchizedek, was as vivid and picturesque a personality as any of his putative progenital princelings in Wales. A fine figure of a man, and there ain't many Marquises to match him, as Mr Kilne, the publican, remarked of him in *Evan Harrington*. It was an unkind fate that destined Melchizedek Meredith to a shop. Tall, handsome, and gallant—in both senses of the word—he was cut out for what he considered higher things—county society, hunting and so forth—which pleasures, in time, he did partake of. But in early life he had to attend to his business, and it was about 1784, having attained his majority, that he started his career as a tailor, and more particularly as a naval outfitter, at No. 73 High Street, Portsmouth, the house in which his famous grandson, George Meredith, was to be born forty-four years later.

The High Street runs at right angles to the sea, and at its sea end, by the Signalling Station and Platform, the road curves round, passing the ancient landing-place known as the Sallyport, to join Broad Street, and so on to the Point. No. 73 is on the

right-hand side, just before this curve commences. It is a very old house, for the present grafted stucco front merely masks a far more ancient building of red brick. At the back the original colouring is still visible, and three picturesque dormer windows break the line of mellow red tiles on the roof. In the Merediths' time the ground floor of the house was occupied by the shop, a door dividing the two windows glazed with old-fashioned small panes of glass. The tailoring workshop was at the back and reached as far as White Hart Road, but no longer exists. These, then, were the premises where matured that famous naval outfitting establishment, which was to become the premier one of its kind in Portsmouth, and as such was mentioned by Captain Marryat in *Peter Simple* : " We called at Meredith's, the tailor, and he promised that, by the next morning, we should be fitted complete." [1] Without doubt the customers and patrons of this establishment included Nelson, Collingwood, Jervis, the Hoods, the Troubridges, Rodney, and all the other great sailors of that most resplendent epoch—in both a fighting and sartorial sense—of the British Navy.

Melchizedek Meredith married about the same time as he started in business and came of age. His wife was some ten years older than he, and, though her surname has not been definitely traced in the family records, she is believed to have been Anne Mitchell, daughter of a lawyer in Portsmouth. Her strong personality and physical appearance, however, survive in portraits painted by both brush and pen. She was a tall woman of ample figure, with great stateliness of carriage, and, like her husband, very handsome. They were a splendid

[1] Vol. II., chap. vi.

couple, and reared a fine family. All their seven children—two sons and five daughters—were born at No. 73 High Street; for thirty years the old house witnessed all the joys and sorrows of their married life—until inevitable Death knocked at the door and severed the partnership. For sixty years Merediths—to the third generation in the person of the novelist—lived here.

The situation of the house was pleasant, for it commanded a view of the sea and the Isle of Wight across Battery Row and the Platform; and to the left was the open space of the Grand Parade, where many stirring military and naval events took place in those days. Here, we may conclude, the Merediths witnessed from their parlour bow-window the brilliant assembly of the Allied Sovereigns with Wellington and Blucher in 1814, after the overthrow of Napoleon; and nine years earlier Nelson had left the George Inn, a little lower down the High Street, after his last night in England, and, passing along Penny Street and by the cheering and weeping and kneeling townspeople, had embarked from the beach beyond Battery Row. For certain, Melchizedek Meredith knew Nelson, for did he not shake hands with his customers? Nelson's Hardy came to lodge with the tailor's widow and son, Augustus, some years later, for on September 7th, 1827, Admiral Sir Thomas Hardy wrote to his brother Joseph: "PORTSMOUTH. . . . I can give you a bed. I am at Meradith's (*sic*), the tailor, 73 High Street, opposite the Parade Coffee House."[1]

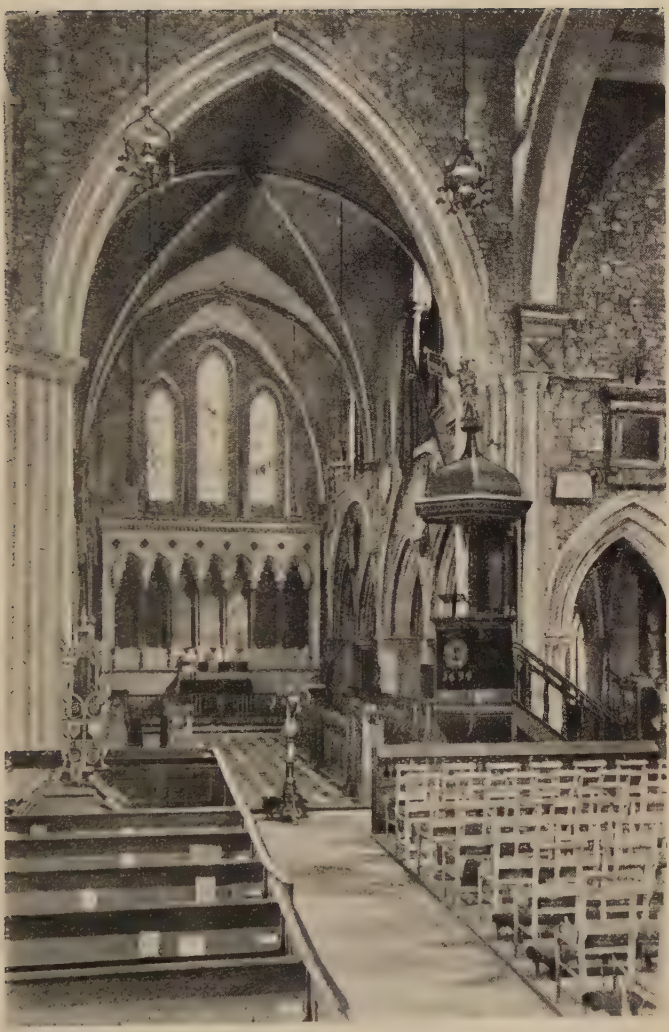
Not far down the High Street stands St Thomas's

[1] I am indebted to Mr Thomas Hardy, O.M., for drawing my attention to this interesting reference in a letter quoted in the late Mr A. M. Broadley's book, *Nelson's Hardy*.

Church, which has many associations with the Merediths, for here they were christened, married, and buried, for three generations. Here, too, Melchizedek Meredith officiated as churchwarden in 1801 and 1803-1804, and, on retiring from office, he and his fellow-warden, Lawrence Smith, presented to their parish church two silver alms plates, which are still in use and have the names of the donors engraved upon them.

How Melchizedek Meredith came by his extraordinary Biblical appellation is unknown (John, his father, must have been a sacerdotal enthusiast), but that he himself approved it and desired its perpetuation is evidenced by the fact that he bestowed the name on two of his unfortunate children, to the utter rout of the spelling powers of the clerks at St Thomas's Church, whose entries in the registers varied from Mellchisidick to other original and clerkly phonetic versions. The youthful Melchizedeks, however, seem to have found the ponderous burden of their second name more than they could bear, for, by a curious coincidence, both died young : Charles Melchizedek, the elder son, died as a small boy in 1794, and Caroline Melchizedek only survived to the age of twenty-four, dying three years after her marriage, in 1809, with William Price Read (who, it is believed, held a post in the Dockyard). In the same year, 1809, her eldest sister, Anne Elizabeth Meredith, was married to Thomas Burbey, a prosperous banker and wholesale grocer, who lived at No. 46 High Street, a large house on the opposite side of the way : Mr Burbey was Mayor of Portsmouth in 1833.

As Kilne, the publican, observes, in *Evan Harrington*, of the Great Mel.'s beautiful daughters, they



St. Thomas's Church, Portsmouth

were a fine family, all of them, and married well. And this remark may be particularly applied to the three remaining daughters, Louisa, Harriet, and Catherine. Possibly, as their nephew suggested in *Evan Harrington*, the marriages had happened by means of the balls that are given in country towns, where the charms of tradesmen's daughters can be seen and admired by others than tradesmen.

But it must also be borne in mind that the father of the girls had an extensive social acquaintance. Melchizedek Meredith's aspirations were not centred in his shop. He was on friendly terms with many of his distinguished naval patrons, and was a welcome guest in some of the best houses of the locality and further afield in Hampshire. In those days the upper classes were very reluctant to admit that a tradesman could also be a gentleman, so it is very evident that Melchizedek had special qualities which procured him admittance gladly to the high and disdainful regions of county society. His grandson proffered the genial suggestion that Melchizedek's good looks and fine figure found favour with certain great ladies of the neighbourhood. Possibly it was so, for the portrait of his grandfather in *Evan Harrington* is in other respects very accurate. It is true there is no evidence that Melchizedek Meredith ever essayed to stand as parliamentary candidate for "Fallowfield"—Petersfield—or that he was often taken to be a member of the Upper House. Still, it is very likely that the story related in the novel, of how he passed as a marquis during a visit to Bath, is true. It may be a confirmatory, or trivial, point that I possess a little enamel snuff-box, bearing a view of Bath on the lid, which was the property of this great-grandfather of mine. As

for the real Melchizedek Meredith, he kept horses and hunted; in 1796, when he was initiated as a Freemason in the Phœnix Lodge, he was described as "a gentleman"; and in 1801 he was an officer in the Portsmouth Yeomanry Cavalry, at a time when patriotism was paramount owing to the threatened invasion of England by Napoleon. Consequently, he had many opportunities of meeting and entertaining men of the superior social class who married his three younger daughters.

The most remarkable of these girls, Louisa Mitchell Meredith, was the original of her nephew's famous creation, the Countess de Saldar, in *Evan Harrington*. Needless to relate, she was brilliant and the wit of the family. Ambitious too, her actual career was perhaps even more romantic than adumbrated by George Meredith. At the age of eighteen, in March, 1811, she was married, in St Thomas's Church, to William Harding Read (born in 1775), who, after serving twenty years in the Royal Navy, as purser, and doing consular work abroad, became Consul-General in the Azores, about 1832. Read was a personal friend of Pedro, Emperor of Brazil and sometime King of Portugal, who created him a Knight of the Order of the Tower and Sword as a mark of royal esteem; and, when in Portugal, Read and his wife maintained a high position in Court circles. In addition to three sons—one being named Guglielmo Meredith—the Reads had a daughter, called Luiza Mitchell after her mother. This girl, born at Ponta Delgada in 1816, was married in 1834, in the island of St Miguel, to Antonio da Costa Cabral, subsequently Marquis de Thomar, the well-known Minister of State during the reign of Donna Maria, second Queen of Portugal. At the time he

met his wife he was acting as Judge in the Azores. Later on he held the office of Minister of Justice at Lisbon; and in 1870 the Count de Thomar (he was created Marquis in 1878) was appointed Ambassador to the Vatican. Thus it came about that the granddaughter of Melchizedek Meredith the tailor died in Rome an Ambassadress—the only lady of that high rank at the Papal Court, where Portugal alone has an Embassy, the other countries being represented by Legations. The Ambassadress's son, Antonio Cabral, second Count de Thomar, was an attaché at the Portuguese Legation in London in 1858, and his son, in turn, was, until recently, in the Portuguese Legation at Berlin. Other members of the family were officers in the army and navy of Portugal. Such were the appropriate descendants of the diplomatic and strategic "Countess de Saldar"—she whose airs and graces and flapping laces, and talk of courts and nobilities, must indeed have created an excitement when she revisited, at rare intervals, her old home in Portsmouth. That is an aptly characteristic scene in *Evan Harrington*—where the Countess arrives after the demise of her father, and, in low society, turns, tactfully, the conversation to the most welcome topic of that stratum of humanity—death and corpses. Somehow, the incongruous figure of the aforetime Louisa Meredith always seems one of the most familiar of the many personalities that haunt the bow-windowed parlour of the old family house in the High Street. The memory of Mrs Read survived in later years among her nephews and nieces as a sort of fairy godmother. She used to send them handsome presents—particularly boxes of rare fruits and sweets from Portugal, where she settled after

the death of her husband in 1839—and ever there attached to her an atmosphere of romance, the conception of one who had early used her wings and flown away from the bourgeois to loftier realms. She had entirely eclipsed tailordom or "Demogorgon" as the Countess called it. Mr Lionel Robinson, an early and intimate friend of George Meredith, told me that the novelist said to him "on more than one occasion that he owed much to one of his aunts who had lived for some time abroad, in Portugal, and that to her he was indebted for his 'manners' and courteous bearing towards women. He always spoke of her with respect and admiration."

The Marquis de Thomar (Louisa Read's son-in-law) had a brother called Silva Cabral, and here is found the source of the name of "Count Silva," used by George Meredith in *Evan Harrington* to designate his uncle-in-law Read. Only once, in later years, did Meredith come near meeting his Portuguese cousins, as he relates in the letter dated 5th August, 1881, to his son Arthur: but apparently George Meredith never met these children of his "Countess de Saldar."

In September of the same year, 1811, that witnessed the wedding of Louisa Meredith, her sister, Harriet Eustace, was married to John Hellyer of Newington, Surrey, a brewer. Little authentic information is available concerning the Hellyers beyond the fact that they were the originals of the Andrew Cogglesbys in *Evan Harrington.*

Although Melchizedek's youngest and most beautiful daughter, Catherine Matilda Meredith, was not married until some years after her father's death, it is more convenient to record now that it was on 28th October, 1819, that she was wedded, in St Thomas's Church, to Samuel Burdon Ellis, then

a lieutenant in the Royal Marines, who subsequently rose to the rank of General and Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath. The Ellises, of course, were the originals of Major and Mrs Strike in *Evan Harrington*. How much the characters of my grandparents were misrepresented I shall point out, in a few words, when dealing with that book later on. My grandfather, S. B. Ellis, was born in 1782 and was twelve years older than my grandmother. He entered the Royal Marines at an early age, and at once took part in many of the naval engagements of the Napoleonic War, including Sir Robert Calder's action, the capture of Guadaloupe, and Trafalgar. In the last-named battle he fought on H.M.S. *Ajax*, and before the action commenced it fell to him to announce to the sailors Nelson's famous signal. He relates in his *Memoirs* :

" There was scarcely any wind at the time, and we approached the enemy at not more than a knot and a half an hour. As we neared the French fleet, I was sent below with orders, and was much struck with the preparations made by the blue-jackets, the majority of whom were stripped to the waist ; a handkerchief was bound tightly round their heads and over the ears, to deaden the noise of the cannon, many men being deaf for days after an action. The men were variously occupied : some were sharpening their cutlasses, others polishing the guns as though an inspection were about to take place instead of a mortal combat, whilst three or four, as if in mere bravado, were dancing a hornpipe ; but all seemed deeply anxious to come to close quarters with the enemy. Occasionally they would look out of the ports, and speculate as to the various ships of

the enemy, many of which had been on former occasions engaged by our vessels. It was at this time that Nelson's famous signal, 'England expects every man to do his duty,' was hoisted at the mast head of the Admiral's ship. These words were requested to be delivered to the men, and I was desired to inform those on the main-deck of the Admiral's signal. Upon acquainting one of the quarter-masters of the order, he assembled the men with 'Avast there, lads, come and hear the Admiral's words.' When the men were mustered, I delivered, with becoming dignity, the sentence,—rather anticipating that the effect on the men would be to awe them by its grandeur. Jack, however, did not appreciate it, for there were murmurs from some, whilst others in an audible whisper muttered, 'Do our duty! Of course we'll do our duty. I've always done mine, haven't you? Let us come alongside of 'em, and we'll soon show whether we will do our duty.' Still, the men cheered vociferously—more, I believe, from love and admiration of their Admiral and leaders, than from a full appreciation of this well-known signal." [1]

S. B. Ellis's numerous other services, during nearly sixty years, in all parts of the world, included the war with China, 1840-1842, when he was senior officer in command of the Royal Marines during the frequent actions the corps engaged in, and for which he received many encomiums and rewards. He eventually became Commandant of Woolwich, was granted a special augmentation of armorial bearings for his services, was created K.C.B. and knighted, and died in 1865. He came of a family whose long

[1] *Memoirs of Sir S. B. Ellis, K.C.B.* Edited by Lady Ellis. 1866.

General Sir S. B Ellis, K.C.B., R.M.L.I., the original of Major Strike in "Evan Harrington"

record of military and naval distinction, through many generations, is unique. His three brothers all entered the navy. Captain John Ellis fought at Cape St Vincent and at Cadiz under Nelson; George Ellis was wounded in action off Calais, and in 1808 his ship was captured near Toulon by a French frigate, and he remained a prisoner of war at Verdun for six years, eventually dying from the effect of hardships experienced there; and Lieutenant Francis Wilson Ellis's many services included the Baltic and the Bombardment of Copenhagen in 1807, when the Danish fleet surrendered. The father of the four brothers, Commander John Ellis, served with the Naval Brigade at the battle of the Plains of Abraham, when Wolfe was killed, at the taking of Quebec, 1759, and through the American War of Independence; and their uncle, Captain Stephen Ellis, Royal Marines, was killed in the attack at the battle of Bunker's Hill, in 1775. Their grandfather, Samuel Ellis, was a lieutenant in Barrel's Regiment, and lost an arm at Culloden, 1745. Their great-grandfather, Samuel Ellis, served in the Low Countries under the Duke of Marlborough, and was captain in the Duke of York's Maritime Regiment at Oudenarde. Earlier direct ancestors included Philip Ellis, a noted cavalier, who defended Rose Castle, in Cumberland, against the Parliamentarians; Sir John Ellis, who was at Marston Moor, and, later, killed in the service of Charles I.; Sir William Ellys, who did great execution against the unfortunate rebels of the Pilgrimage of Grace; Sir Henry Ellys, slain at Bosworth Field, 1485; Sir William Ellys, who is mentioned as accompanying Edward III. to France; Sir William Ellys, who served under Earl Warrenne against the Scots

at Dunbar and Stirling; Sir Thomas Ellys, slain at the assault on Northampton, 1265; and Sir Archibald Ellys, a noted crusader in the service of Richard I.

The three sons of Catherine Meredith carried on the fighting traditions of their father's family. The eldest, George Ellis, long years after, had his boyhood's portrait drawn very faithfully by his first cousin and namesake, George Meredith, as Crossjay Patterne in *The Egoist*. George Ellis, like his literary presentment, was a restless, high-spirited lad, with a passion for the navy, which he entered at the age of fifteen. He became purser, but his roving spirit, fretting at inaction—for there was no naval warfare during his time—caused him to leave the Service and emigrate to South Africa. From thence he went to America, where he was eventually killed at the battle of Bull's Run, 1861, in the American Civil War, fighting as a volunteer in the Southern Army, thus closing his adventurous career at the age of thirty-nine. His two brothers entered their father's corps, the Royal Marines; Samuel died, from the effects of service, a lieutenant, in 1847; and Arthur Ellis (my father) rose to the rank of Colonel, after over thirty years' service, including the Crimean War, when he was wounded at the Bombardment of Sebastopol, and died in 1885. George Meredith thus long survived all his English first cousins: he and Arthur Ellis were born in the same year, 1828, and much resembled each other in personal appearance.

To revert to 1811, the year which witnessed two weddings of the Meredith daughters, there soon ensued a period of trouble and death for the family. The Great Mel. (who, I fear, keeps banging up and down this family chapter, like a pertinacious cracker,

much as he did at the dinner-table of Beckley Court), having been long indifferent to money matters and given to much generous hospitality, was now faced by serious financial difficulties for the neglected business. In 1812 his eldest daughter, Mrs Burbey, died, four months after the birth of her only child, Mary Meredith Burbey (subsequently Mrs Pratt Wills). In 1813, five months later, his second daughter, Caroline, Mrs W. P. Read, died; and on 10th July, 1814, Melchizedek Meredith himself expired, in the prime of life, at the age of fifty-one. The demise of him who had been at once the sad dog of Portsmouth, and the pride of the town, is but unromantically recorded in the local paper, *The Hampshire Courier*, of 18th July, 1814, under Portsmouth: "Died on Sunday, 10th inst., much respected, Mr M. Meredith, aged 51, who for many years carried on a respectable trade in the Men's Mercery line in this town."

It may safely be surmised that some such scenes as are depicted in the first chapter of *Evan Harrington* did in reality follow the death of Melchizedek, for at the very outset George Meredith gives the actual names of certain neighbouring tradesmen living in the High Street at the time. Robert Kilne was the landlord of the Wellington Tavern, No. 62, exactly opposite the Merediths' shop; Barnes was a pork butcher near the church; "Grossby" was intended for William Grossmith, the confectioner, at No. 77, four doors from the Merediths; Mrs Fiske was the wife of the jeweller of that name at No. 59; and Goren was probably meant for Joseph Galt, a rival tailor, at No. 63.

So passed the gorgeous tailor—a robust Brummel and the Regent of low life; and after being laid out

in his old yeomanry uniform, sword and vast helmet by his side, the house permeated with the cooking odour of funeral baked meats, the body of the Great Mel., attended by his widow and surviving children, was laid to rest in the family vault in St Mary's burial ground. This is close to St Thomas's Church, and an ancient place of sepulture for the parish of Portsmouth. It is now disused and abandoned—like the derelict Church of St Mary it surrounds. Barracks and some very poor cottages abut right on to the graves, and the dismal scene reminds one of that ghastly burial ground in *Bleak House* where Lady Dedlock dreed her weird.

The Great Mel. buried, there remained now in the old home his widow; his youngest daughter, Catherine; and his only surviving son, Augustus Urmston Meredith,[1] born in 1797, who was but seventeen years of age at the time of his father's premature death. He had been destined and partially trained for the medical profession, for he had no desire for tailoring or any business aptitude. He possessed some measure of the family beauty and *savoir faire*, and was in all ways a presentable youth, far above his station in life. It is very likely that, as adumbrated in *Evan Harrington*, he was on a visit to his sister, Louisa Read, in Lisbon, when the

[1] The nomenclature of Augustus Meredith has a curious history. He was baptized at St Thomas's Church, 7th February, 1797, and his Christian names were entered in the register as Gustave Urmston; but a few years later they were corrected to Augustus Armstrong, the alteration being initialled by the Rev. J. G. Bussell, curate in charge of the parish. As the boy grew up he accepted the name of Augustus, but not that of Armstrong, for when he witnessed the marriage of his sister, Catherine Matilda, to S. B. Ellis, in 1819, he signed his name in the register "A. U. Meredith"; and when he eventually died, in 1876, the names inscribed on his tombstone were "Augustus Urmston Meredith."

KING JAMES'S GATE, BROAD STREET, PORTSMOUTH

From Charpentier's lithograph, 1830

fatal illness of the father destroyed his ambitions and recalled him to Portsmouth to assist his widowed mother with a—to him—distasteful business and the problem of raising money to pay off the large debts left by the deceased Melchizedek, who never was known to have sent in a bill. It is to be hoped that his heirs and assigns were able to collect some portion of the long outstanding debts, but whatever accrued did not benefit the daughters of the house, for they, in turn, had nothing to bequeath to their children in the way of money.

For the next few years the tailoring business was in the capable hands of the admirable Mrs Meredith, whilst her son did his best to fit himself and become experienced, more or less as described in the sartorial novel. In 1819, the last of the Meredith girls having married, as we have seen, an officer of Marines, mother and son were left alone in the old home from whence the father and all the five fine daughters had departed—to the grave or distant places, a sad change truly. Mrs Meredith's advancing years made it advisable for her son to look out for a wife and housekeeper. He did not require to look far. Just round the corner had lived a playmate of his in childhood days, Jane Eliza Macnamara, born in 1802, daughter of Michael Macnamara, of "The Vine," Broad Street, one of a row of houses, nearly all inns, just beyond the Sallyport and King James's Gate on the site now covered by the Point Barracks. This was the wife selected by Augustus Meredith, and he chose well, though he probably knew and cared nothing about eugenics. Despite her origin, Jane Macnamara was a refined and talented girl, and no unworthy mother of her famous son, who had a double heritage of personal beauty, from both

parents. His maternal grandfather, Michael Macnamara (who died, in 1815, "much respected, an old inhabitant of this town," as a Portsmouth paper records), had married Sarah, daughter of Thomas and Catherine Dale, of Portsmouth. Consequently, George Meredith was ignorant of his own pedigree when he stated, as reported: "My mother was pure Irish." [1] His actual link with Ireland was as remote as his paternal one with Wales: but it is interesting proof of the power of Celtic blood to assert itself that, despite many blendings with English strains, and long association with Hampshire, George Meredith was predominantly a Celt, though, as he said to Mr Clodd, "there must have been some Saxon strain in the ancestry to account for a virility of temperament which corrected the Celtic in me": the Saxon strains were the more numerous.

So Augustus Meredith brought home his wife to the old family house, No. 73 High Street, Portsmouth, and there, on 12th February, 1828, was born their only child, George Meredith. The boy was baptized on 9th April following, in St Thomas's Church, and presumably he was named George after a cousin, George Meredith, born in 1801. One is tempted to picture in imagination the scene in the dim, musty church: the young parents, and probably some of the beautiful aunts and their husbands, all in the quaint, stiff dresses and uniforms of the period; and then the return to the spacious, bow-windowed parlour on the first floor, over the shop at No. 73, for the christening refection, presided over by the stately Mrs Mel.

But Anne Meredith's course was nearly run. She

[1] Letter from Mr Coulson Kernahan, *Daily Chronicle*, 4th April, 1912.

died seven months later, on 28th November, 1828, aged seventy-five (six days after the birth of another grandson, Arthur Ellis). As related in *Evan Harrington*, ghosts were the only childish enjoyment Mrs Mel. allowed herself, and she did not care to converse about the dead, save in their aspect as ghosts. So, to follow her example, in the absence of record of any ghostly manifestations, we will refrain from further reference to her demise to be found in family letters, only pausing to note, as confirmation of her superstitious nature, that in her old-fashioned net purse there is still preserved a silver coin of the date 1703. This coin was placed in Mrs Meredith's mouth as the moment of mortal dissolution approached. What relic this custom was of some far-away folk-lore superstition, or how it could be expected to speed the parting soul (perhaps it was a sort of entrance fee to Ghostland, or Charon's fare for Styx ferry), it is impossible now to say. Whatever the explanation, the rite was evidently a family tradition, for the coin was carefully preserved by Mrs Meredith's youngest daughter and handed down, together with the story, to her children.

His mother dead, henceforth Augustus Meredith was sole master of 73 High Street, which is now in our family panopticon to be the background of the early scenes in the life of his famous son.

73 High Street, Portsmouth, the birthplace of George Meredith
[*From a Contemporary Lithograph*

CHAPTER II

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

ACCORDING to George Meredith's own statements, his childhood was not a happy time. But that was the fault of his own temperament and constitutional antagonism to his environment, for, despite the immediate circumstances of his heredity, he was an aristocrat by nature and in person—one of the most remarkable examples of atavism. Personally—during his early years at any rate—he was loved and cared for by both his parents, and was, in fact, petted and allowed to have his own way to a degree very unusual at that time, when children were treated in a somewhat Spartan manner and had little opportunity of doing as they liked or of expressing their own opinions.

As is generally the case with an only child, brought up entirely in the society of his elders, and an auditor of their conversation, Meredith developed early and always had something of contempt or dislike for juveniles of his own age. He was a very reserved and acutely sensitive boy, afraid of ghosts and of being left alone in the dark, and, as I have indicated, a trifle spoilt by his relatives in his position of a solitary little child in a house which had held six or seven lively children in the preceding generation of the family. I discovered a gentleman who well remembered George Meredith at the age of two years, one who had been his neighbour and playmate in

73, High Street, Portsmouth, showing the alteration on the ground floor since the Merediths' time

Photograph by H. Symonds & Co., Portsmouth

those far-away days. In 1830, No. 74 [1] High Street, the house next door to the Merediths', was occupied by David Brent Price, printer and bookseller, and his young family. The youngest son, James Brent Price, born in 1826, when about four years old, was one day invited in to No. 73 to "play with young George"; and here are his recollections of the future novelist as a child of two or three:

"I went up to the large front drawing-room, where I found the boy and a lady who must have been his mother. The boy did not seem to care much about playing with me, and I was rather shy. He brought me his toys and picture books to see, and I was mightily pleased, I remember, with a horse and cart (not like the many cheap ones that I had seen)—a beautiful lifelike white horse, and the cart of superior make, and as George drew it along it made music as the wheels went round. What I remember of the child's appearance is somewhat hazy—a boy in white frock and blue ribbons tied up his sleeves,[2] but he was certainly a pretty child. I spent the afternoon with him, but we did not get on much together as he assumed a sort of superiority.[3]

"In February, 1832 or 1833, there came to us from No. 73 an invitation to a party—'Tea and Ball to keep the birthday of Master George Meredith.' It invited 'The Misses and Masters Price,' so my two sisters, my elder brother and myself went in on the auspicious evening. We have often laughed in after years at the way my brother fulfilled his duties to us.

[1] Admiral Lord Anson had lived here for a time in the preceding century.

[2] See the portrait of Meredith at this age, frontispiece of vol. i. of *The Letters of George Meredith*.

[3] Though he was two years younger than Price!

He gave a single knock to the side door and when a servant came he said, '*Please, we are come!*' We were the first of the visitors, and were shown into the drawing-room, and all four of us sat down on a sofa. Shortly after, knocks came continually, a lady received the company, and introduced the later comers to those who were there. We were removed to a rout seat, many of these being round the room. Tea and coffee and cakes were handed round by servants. I did not know many of the people, but I *did* some of them, viz., the Harrisons of *The Hampshire Telegraph*, the Dudleys, the Pineos, and the Hintons, as they all lived quite near us. There must have been over fifty altogether, but mostly 'grown-ups.' After tea the lady announced that the company were to go to the next room, and that Mr Macnamara[1] would be M.C. The musicians soon struck up, and a first set was announced. I was given a 'grown-up' as a partner and pushed through the figures, but I was such a failure that I had to sit the rest of the evening—a mere spectator. At intervals I was regaled with quarters of oranges, almonds and raisins, and weak negus. I got very sleepy. Supper was announced, and there was a rush to the front drawing-room. I got near my sisters and brother, and was pressed to partake of tarts and cake. At last the lady said, 'It is time those children went home,' so my brother took us home, and as regards myself I was very glad to be there. At this birthday party George was, of course, made much of by everyone. He was then out of the frock-petticoat period. He and I often met after this, but we did not fraternise much. He

[1] Presumably Mrs Augustus Meredith's brother, who became a clergyman and lived for some time in Southsea at a later period.

used just to say, 'How de do,' and nod. I did the same."

It could not have been long after the date of this party that Mrs Meredith died, at the early age of thirty-one. The event is noted briefly in *The Hampshire Telegraph* of 15th July, 1833: "Portsmouth. Died on Thursday morning, after a short illness, Mrs Meredith, wife of Mr Meredith of this town." She was buried at St Thomas's in the vault of her Macnamara and Dale relatives. To George Meredith in after years his mother was only a shadowy memory. As he told a friend mourning a mother, he had this shock when he was a little boy, and merely wondered. But Mrs Meredith's early death probably had a share in the mental development of her son, for had she lived during the period of his adolescence he would have been happier and his home conditions very different; and consequently he would not have been so introspective and lonely in spirit, or so soon have propounded the truth of the words, dear to poets: "They learn in suffering what they teach in song."

The family at No. 73, Augustus Meredith and his small son of five, being now destitute of feminine influences, George was looked after, as far as possible, by his adult cousin, Mary Meredith Burbey, from across the road, and his aunt, Mrs Ellis, at such times as her own family duties enabled her to be in or near Portsmouth. He was now of an age to take notice of things, and his surroundings offered interesting and lively material for his first impressions of life.

The Portsmouth of Meredith's childhood was a vastly different place from the town of to-day.

Owing to the removal of the Admiralty offices to Portsea, all trade and traffic are now centred there, and naval life congregates round the Dockyard and Whale Island, leaving the High Street stranded and quiet. Eighty years ago the sea end of High Street was almost entirely composed of shops: now they are converted into private residences, including No. 73. But George Meredith's early years were passed in the very heart and whirl of English maritime life. His home was just at the edge of the world, so to speak, for here at the Sallyport and Point all sailors then landed and took their pleasures without delay, both officers and men. He must have seen many famous seamen, for close by were all the popular resorts of the officers: the George Hotel and the Fountain (where Mr Midshipman Easy routed the first lieutenant) were both in the High Street; and the Blue Posts (rendezvous of Peter Simple and every other midshipman) was in Broad Street—all in close proximity to the Meredith shop, where an officer could be "fitted complete." As before stated, almost every house in Broad Street was a tavern, and the adjoining purlieus of East Street, Bathing Lane, Bath Square, and Tower Street were devoted mainly to houses of ill-fame. On the site of what is now Tower House (the home of Mr W. L. Wyllie, R.A.) stood a particularly lively tavern where music—of a sort—was provided. Off the High Street, too, were similar places, and in St Mary's Street (now Highbury Street) a most notorious music hall, eventually abolished. All kinds of excitement, from murder downwards, were at hand for the delectation of the boys of the neighbourhood. And there were numerous barracks and much military pomp and circumstance. Portsmouth was

HIGH STREET, PORTSMOUTH
From Charpentier's lithograph, 1830

then strongly fortified, and defended by walls, bastions, moats, guard-houses, and gates. These last were closed at a certain hour at night, and, after that, belated inhabitants could only obtain admission by giving the countersign to the sentries on guard. A mounted officer went the "Grand Round" of the town, and the conditions were entirely those of a strictly guarded garrison. To stray beyond St James's Gate into Broad Street after dark was to court many dangers, including the activities of the Press-gang.

Opposite the Merediths' house was held, on the Grand Parade, in July, for the most exciting fortnight in the exciting year, the annual Fair, a veritable pandemonium which it became necessary to abolish in the forties. Richardson's Show always had the best pitch, by the Bank at the corner of the High Street, and adjoining it was Wombwell's menagerie of wild beasts. Probably young George Meredith disdained these vulgar entertainments, and he does not seem to have been much interested in the naval and military life that surrounded him, although he came into personal contact with officers who could have given him accounts of their experiences at Trafalgar, Cape St Vincent, the Baltic and in the sinking of the *Royal George*. For his uncle by marriage, S. B. Ellis, and this uncle's brothers, came to Portsmouth and 73 High Street, and a friend of the Ellises was the Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth in 1837, Admiral Sir Philip Durham, who had been a lieutenant on the *Royal George* when she went down. To illustrate the social conditions George Meredith was familiar with as a young boy, I give a few extracts from the journal of my grandfather, S. B. Ellis, who, *en route* to service in India, had

anchored at Spithead, when he took the opportunity to see much of his brother-in-law and other relatives in Portsmouth.

"6*th September*, 1837. Landed after breakfast. Walked with Mrs Burbey [1] and daughters to their garden at Southsea.

"7*th September*. Landed in the afternoon, and dined with the Commandant of Royal Marines, Colonel Hornby, at his house in St Thomas's Street.

"8*th September*. Remained on shore, and dined with Mr Thomas Burbey; in the evening there was music and dancing. Returned at a late hour, and slept at Mr Meredith's in the High Street.

"9*th September*. Had the unexpected pleasure once more to shake by the hand my kind brother Frank, who had come to Portsmouth to see me before my final departure for India.

"12*th September*. Accompanied my brother to Gosport and visited with him the *Britannia*, the flagship of Sir P. Durham, the Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth. Returned and dined with Mr Meredith in Portsmouth."

As befitted the original of Evan Harrington, Augustus Meredith was more addicted to the society of those in higher circles than that of his neighbours, the tradespeople of the High Street, a characteristic which his young son inherited or very soon copied. But the real Augustus Meredith was a very superior man, and scant justice has been done to him by those who merely echo the crushing dictum of his son that he was "a muddler and a fool." If George Meredith

[1] This was Thomas Burbey's second wife, Mary Bradley. Her son, George Burbey, born 1829, was one of the few boys George Meredith cared for at this date.

really used these words, it must be remembered that he delighted in imparting a freakish touch of exaggeration to his statements, and, like all great men, he suffers the penalty of too meticulous records of his conversation, whether in grave or light mood. Augustus Meredith and his son were alike physically, and they both had the love of walking many miles in the country over hill and dale. Augustus was a great chess-player and very fond of reading. He was a member of the Portsmouth Literary and Philosophical Society. There is other evidence that he was a cultured, generous man: "a perfect gentleman and not in the least like a tailor" is the report of one who knew him well, though, in view of the fact that he never wanted to be a tailor, the latter part of the statement is not surprising. But why the highly honourable and necessary calling of a tailor should bring any discredit or opprobrium upon its professor, and a hatter, a hosier, and a bootmaker be exempt from disgrace and disdain and division into a fractional ninth of a man, with concomitant goose and cabbage, is a profound sartorial mystery which neither Sir Piercie Shafton nor the Harringtons satisfactorily explain.[1]

It must be admitted that, like his father before him, Augustus Meredith was very careless in money matters, and very hospitable. He entertained his friends often, and he had a curious habit of retiring from the head of his table early, leaving his guests with wine without stint—certainly not an economical plan in those days of two-or-three-bottle men. Money was accordingly short at No. 73, for the incubus of the Great Mel.'s debts still remained, and

[1] John Accutus, the warrior, was originally a tailor, and so were John Stow and John Speed, the topographists.

the income from the neglected business was much reduced. So it was found necessary to let off part of the house, and the drawing-room and a large back room (over the workshop) were duly rented by Sir Edward Synge, an eccentric Irish baronet.[1] Perhaps this arrangement enabled Augustus Meredith to provide better schooling, clothes, and amusements for his son than fell to the lot of the other boys round about their home. It is strange that the father never succeeded in winning the affection and sympathy of his uncommon son, for undoubtedly, to the best of his ability, Augustus did all he could to give his child a good education and such pleasures as he liked. He sincerely loved the boy.

About 1837 George Meredith was sent as a day scholar to St Paul's School, Southsea, a seminary —to use the word beloved of pedagogues of that period—which existed from 1825 to 1850. (Long's Memorial Hall, at the corner of St Paul's Square and King Street, is said to be the original school building, though adapted to the purposes for which it is now used.) After becoming a pupil at this superior Fount of Learning, young George was more aloof than ever from his boy neighbours in the High Street—Jem Price from next door, Ned Galt from No. 63, Joe Neale from the Coffee House at the corner of Grand Parade, and many others, for all these lads imbibed knowledge at the far humbler stream of Frost's Academy in St Thomas's Street. Mr Price, before mentioned, related some amusing reminiscences of these schooldays :

[1] Sir Edward Synge was a first cousin of the grandfather of J. M. Synge, dramatist and poet. Sir Edward later took a house farther up the High Street. His youngest son, General Millington Synge, remained faithful to Portsmouth, and died at 61 High Street, where also his widow lived until her death in 1915.

"The boys of St Paul's looked down upon us, Frost's boys, but George Meredith and I when we met always exchanged salutations: 'How de do, Price,' in his usual drawling, patronising way. He was certainly a good-looking youth, with bright blue or grey eyes, and a nice, light, curly head of hair, and always well dressed, much better than any of us boys, all sons of tradespeople. We were, however, a jolly lot of boys—trundled hoops, played at marbles, whip and peg-tops, rounders, prisoner's base, pitch-hat, and on winter nights at 'nickey-night,' with flint and steel to strike when told to 'show your light.' To these sort of things George Meredith never stooped, and, in consequence, he got the name of 'Gentleman Georgy' amongst us boys. We often waited for the Convict Guard to come to the Guard House on the Parade, where the soldiers had to draw their cartridges, and we boys collected the powder and made what we called 'Devils' by mixing our saliva with the powder and working it into a pyramid, and then set light to it at the top—it was really a pretty bit of fireworks. Need I say George Meredith did not join in this?

"It was in 1839 that I saw the last of George Meredith. We Frost boys had been running races on the Governor's Green, and several of us were together talking when George Meredith joined us just opposite the Parade Coffee House, kept by a man named Neale, who owned a racehorse. G. M. was on this occasion very affable to us, as a boy, Joe Neale, son of the Coffee House keeper, was with us. George Meredith said to Neale: 'I was at Stokes Bay races last week and I saw your father's horse come in *second*, but I think he is a grand horse. By George! he's got some blood in him!' *N.B.*—

This young gentleman was at the most eleven years old!"

Despite this dashing comment on horseflesh, evidently a Mendelian echo of Melchizedek, it is to be feared that George Meredith's young contemporaries regarded him in the main as "a cocky prig" —for how could these normal, healthy, common little boys be expected to understand, or sympathise with, the manifestations of a dawning genius as exemplified in the character of this uncommon boy all too conscious of his own rare personality and superior gifts. He looked down upon his young companions and analysed them disdainfully. As he stated in after years, he had the faculty in boyhood of reading the characters of his friends consummately. He lived in a romantic world of his own imagining, and all normal, conventional things bored him. He has left a vivid picture of the Sunday devotions of his childhood.[1]

He relates how all love of the apostles and scriptural celebrities in general was knocked out of him by three services every Sunday of appalling length and drowsiness. *Corinthians*, he said, would always be associated in his mind with rows of candles and a holy drone overhead. He invented a mental serial story, which ran from Sunday to Sunday during the sermons, concerning the adventures of St George, the while the young "author" fidgeted on the hard seats of St Thomas's Church.

As for books, he found his chief pleasure in *The Arabian Nights*, which, as he said, doubtless fed an imagination which took shape in *The Shaving of Shagpat*.

[1] See letter to Dr Jessopp, 23rd December, 1862.

But in boyhood, as in all the future, Meredith found his greatest delight in Nature, though in his Portsmouth days the country was somewhat distant from his home. In several of his early poems, written a few years subsequent to the period we are considering, there are allusions to the joys he experienced as a boy amid the beauties of Nature and wild life. Particularly is this so in the *Song* ("Under boughs of breathing May"); in *To a Skylark*; and in his lovely *Spring Song*.

In these speaks the real youthful Meredith. A wonderful thing, for this was not a country-bred boy imbued in earliest days with the wonders of Nature. He had to discover and recover them himself, unaided and alone. For, as we have seen, this was a town-bred boy, the son of tradespeople, born, reared, and schooled in a great seaport, distant from woods and country-side. True, he had the sea, but, unlike the case of Swinburne, the "fair green-girdled mother" did not influence him in any degree. The sea and naval history, so paramount in Portsmouth, never inspired the youthful muse of Meredith. His love of Nature, birds and flowers, mountain and woodland, was innate, and he had his own secret dreams and delights amid the maritime and commercial surroundings of his boyhood, to him so uncongenial and sordid.

In 1841 came many changes in the life of George Meredith, now thirteen years old. His father married a second wife, Matilda Buckett, who, it seems, had previously been housekeeper at No. 73. His financial position not improving, Augustus Meredith decided to leave Portsmouth and make a fresh start at tailoring in London. He accordingly disposed of his business to his neighbour, Joseph Galt, who

figures as the occupant of the old Meredith house in the Directory of 1842. What became of Augustus during the next three years is not clear, but from 1846 to 1849 he carried on a tailor's business at 26 St James's Street, London, which ought to have been a profitable speculation, for it may be presumed that many naval officers who had patronised the Portsmouth establishment in past years would return to their old tailor now that he was located in the midst of Clubland.[1] But Augustus Meredith's lack of business aptitude always nullified his schemes, and the London venture was not a success. Upon the break-up of the home in Portsmouth, George Meredith was sent to a boarding-school in the country for a year. Personally, I think this school is depicted as Rippenger's in *The Adventures of Harry Richmond*, and that some of the youthful adventures of Harry were in fact an echo of those of George Meredith, for he endows his hero with the same airs of superiority and penetrative capacity [2] for reading the characters and motives of his companions that he himself possessed even from boyhood, as we have seen. And just as young Harry Richmond went later to Germany, so did Meredith.

Meredith parted from his birthplace and the only home he had hitherto known without any regrets.[3] Portsmouth, apparently, had no happy memories for

[1] The original house and shop at 26 St James's Street are now gone; the site is covered by the building known as Ormonde House, adjoining Ryder Street.

[2] Chapter ix.

[3] The tablet placed on No. 73 High Street, at my suggestion, by the Corporation of Portsmouth, in 1913, bears the words: "In this house was born on the 12th of February, 1828, George Meredith, Novelist and Poet, who lived here until his thirteenth year."

him: only those of sad or painful things magnified from trifles by his super-sensitive imagination and temperament. He never spoke in after years, with regretful reminiscence, of his childhood, as do most men of the only golden time (if it is happy) of life. Inscrutably he put those "days and dreams out of mind," and Portsmouth never furnished scene or incident for his literary work beyond that bitter transcript of family history in *Evan Harrington*.[1] His father he never cared for, and he did not keep in touch, after boyhood, with many relatives. They —commercial and naval people—were not in a position to help him to a congenial livelihood, or likely to sympathise with romantic, literary aspirations, and he, proud, reserved, and intellectually their superior, mutual misunderstandings, and possibly dislike, were not unlikely to ensue. Consequently, Meredith faced life in the outer world friendless, poor, and desolate in spirit.

He had inherited a little money from his mother, and the trustee of the small estate was now charged with the educational arrangements of the boy, who accordingly entered the Moravian School at Neuwied on the Rhine, 18th August, 1842. Here his education really commenced, for at his previous schools, as he said, "I learned very little." The influences of his experiences in Germany were very strongly stamped on his subsequent mental career. His poetry, *Farina* (particularly), *The Adventures of Harry Richmond*, *The Tragic Comedians*, and *One of our Conquerors*, all bear the impress of his admiration for Germany and the good qualities of the

[1] The only passage, that I recall, in Meredith's other work that might be construed as an echo from early influences in Portsmouth is in chapter two of *The Amazing Marriage*, relative to the swearing habits of sailors of the old days.

people, though he was equally observant of their absurdities and faults. Although in late sad days the German character has been overwhelmed by a flood of false culture and savage megalomania, it is childish and futile to deny the many charms that the country possesses or has created in the past. German music, some portion of German literature, German wine, German scenery—the stately curves of the Rhine bordered by ruined castles, or the wild, wooded mountains of the north and south, all permeated with legend and romance—such things are essential and will survive the madness of any passing German ruling caste. And these were, primarily, the things that appealed so vividly to the plastic imagination of the youthful George Meredith, and to which he gave such beautiful expression in his early poem, *Pictures of the Rhine.*

George Meredith was fourteen years of age when he became a pupil at the Moravian School at Neuwied, on the romantic Coblenz-Cologne section of the Rhineland scenery. The school had been founded in 1756, and it was ever famous for its excellent liberal education, and for the installation of true Christian and social ideals in the minds of its pupils. During the first fifty years of its existence the scholars were mainly Swiss. Many German boys came later, but from 1832 to 1842 British youths formed the majority, and this decade was known as "The English Period." The late Professor Henry Morley preceded Meredith as a pupil by a few years, and throughout his life retained the greatest interest in his old school. Fifty-five years after his time there he was editing a magazine which aimed at keeping in touch with the pupils, past and present, of the various Moravian Schools abroad;

and at a meeting of "Old Neuwieders" in London, 1889, he paid this tribute to the particular establishment which had included Meredith among its scholars: "No formal process of education had acted upon their lives so thoroughly or so much for their good as the little time they had spent at Neuwied. It had taken all the bitterness out of their lives, all envy and hatred and uncharitableness having been so thoroughly removed from them by contact with the gentle spirit of the old Moravians." Mr J. A. Hammerton in his useful work, *George Meredith in Anecdote and Criticism*, gives an excellent verbal picture of Neuwied and the school which claims quotation here:

"We may reasonably assume that Meredith's schooldays at Neuwied represent a period of the utmost importance to his after life, and the scene of this early influence on one of the greatest figures in modern literature is worthy of some little notice, for one so observant and vigilant as Meredith must have been, even as a boy, could not have lived there long before he had absorbed the spirit of the place, and doubtless that passion for long walks and hill-climbing, which later characterised his days of lusty manhood, first awoke among the historic heights along the right bank of the Rhine from Neuwied to the Drachenfels. The Moravian Schools at Neuwied have long been famous throughout Europe, and many notable Englishmen have passed through them. Their origin dates from the time of Prince Alexander of Neuwied—the town was formerly the capital of a little principality—who was a shining example of liberalism in an age of bigotry, and who, in 1762, during the religious unrest and intolerance

of his time, made free of his little town to all the sects that cared for religion sufficiently to stand by their convictions. Lutherans, Calvinists, Catholics, Moravians, Jews, were all allowed in Neuwied the fullest liberty of thought and worship; being, as an old writer quaintly puts it, 'children of the same Parent, subjects of the same moral government, candidates alike for a future state, they are taught to reflect that the articles in which they agree are of infinitely greater importance than those on which they differ, and that the minutiæ and speculative opinions cannot annihilate the primary duty of brotherly love.' The partisans of each sect were allowed to maintain their own ministers and conform each according to their established convictions, without any form of interference from the state. A little religious Utopia! Out of this grew up the remarkable educational establishment of the Moravians, whence so many of the famous missionaries of that small but energetic body have gone out to the far places of the earth. Neuwied was happy in its princes, the little town was beautifully laid out, industries encouraged, and life must have flowed along there with melodious and purposeful rhythm for generations. When Meredith became a Neuwieder, the town had a population of about 5000, but to-day it has considerably extended and contains some 10,000 inhabitants. It was the scene of Cæsar's crossing of the Rhine, and the district was rich in Roman antiquities, which the care of Prince Alexander first brought together in the museum of his palace, still one of the features of the place. We may conclude that something of this spirit of liberalism, which must still have been electrical in the air of Neuwied in the earlier years of last century,

entered into the young Meredith and conditioned the shaping of his mind."

The religious spirit of the place was also strongly impressed, though only temporarily, upon Meredith's young mind. He was at Neuwied for two years, without any break of holidays at home, and it was during this period that he went through that process of religious unrest and excitement—sometimes introspective and morbid, in other cases enthusiastic or ecstatic—which is a common experience in the development of an imaginative boy or girl at about the age of fifteen. As he told Mr Clodd, when he was quite a boy he had a spasm of religion which lasted about six weeks, during which he made himself a nuisance in asking everybody whether they were saved. Interesting evidence on this point is furnished by the earliest letter of Meredith's that has been traced, one written at the time of his departure from Neuwied to a boy named R. M. Hill, his schoolfellow there, in July, 1844. In this, after alluding to the fellowship which had bound them together at school, he said true fellowship could only be had with Christianity—the practice of it. He wished his friend the greatest of all things—God's blessing, which comprised all he would or could say.

Curious to think that the mortal ashes of him who wrote this devout letter in youth should, sixty-five years later, be denied interment in Westminster Abbey on account of religious views presumably not up to a decanal standard. But then, of course, this was the dust of him who had said: Parsondom has always been against progress; they treat Christianity, not as a religion, but as an institution.

CHAPTER III

ADOLESCENCE IN LONDON. FIRST MARRIAGE. EARLY LITERARY WORK. WEYBRIDGE. "POEMS, 1851"

GEORGE MEREDITH left Neuwied in 1844, and the next two years of his life are a blank. What he did between his sixteenth and eighteenth years and where he lived is unrecorded, though it is permissible to presume he was with his father in London, and possibly attended to the account work of the business. As we have seen, Augustus Meredith was at 26 St James's Street in 1846, the year which provides the next authentic fact of his son's career, for it was on 3rd February that George Meredith commenced his duties as an articled clerk with Richard Stephen Charnock, a solicitor and Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, whose offices were at 44 Paternoster Row, and later at 10 Godliman Street. Charnock belonged to the Arundel Club, whose members included Dickens, R. H. Horne, and Lord John Manners.

According to Meredith's account, during his absence in Germany his little legacy from his mother had suffered serious diminution by the mismanagement of his trustee. He was made a ward in Chancery, and the residue of his money was mainly devoted to fitting him for the profession of the Law. Although he said his legal employer "had neither business nor morals," Charnock was an interesting and cultured man of literary gifts who did not discourage similar tastes in his pupil; and though

George was articled and bound to him for five years, Charnock seems to have released the boy from legal obligations when Meredith decided to act like Scott, Disraeli, Harrison Ainsworth, Charles Reade, Sheridan Le Fanu, F. C. Burnand, and many other writers, who all abandoned the Law for the lure of Literature.

Charnock, indeed, had some considerable share in starting Meredith on his literary road, for he introduced the lad to his own set of intimates, mainly writers and artists, including Edward Peacock and Mrs Nicolls, son and daughter of Thomas Love Peacock, the polished novelist and former friend of Shelley. This was an intensely appreciated sequence of associations for the eager boy, compact of dreams and aspirations. Further, Charnock was mainly instrumental in giving expression to the work of his little literary coterie by starting, about 1848, a manuscript magazine entitled *The Monthly Observer*. The various contributions, written on quarto sheets, were bound together, and then circulated among the contributors, each of whom, in turn, acted as editor and critic. Here, in the number for April, 1849, appeared George Meredith's earliest published poem, *Chillianwallah*. It was criticised by the editor for the month, Austin Daniel, and several of his suggestions were adopted, and the third stanza omitted, when the poem attained the glory of actual print in *Chambers's Journal* for 7th July, 1849, three months after the original manuscript circulation in the amateur magazine. Five numbers of *The Monthly Observer*, including two edited by Meredith, were sold for £80 at Sotheby's a few years ago, and crossed the Atlantic to join the famous bibliographical collections of Mr H. E.

Widener.[1] Meredith's share as critic of his fellow-contributors' work included a pungent observation, which adumbrated the style of the years to come, to the effect that inspiration, like Balaam's Ass, suddenly stopped short of itself, despite all the whipping and spurring of the infatuated jockey, who comprehended not the divine instinct of his Pegasus.

It was in this same year, 1849, that Augustus Meredith gave up his business in St James's Street and emigrated with his wife to South Africa, a very adventurous undertaking in those early days of travel and colonisation. He established himself as a tailor in St George's Street, Cape Town, where we will take another glimpse of him a little later on, when considering *Evan Harrington*. George Meredith was now homeless in London, and was obliged to take lodgings—or probably only one room—at No. 7 Upper Ebury Street, Pimlico.[2] It was from here that he wrote, on 4th June, 1849, to Messrs Chambers respecting his poem *Chillianwallah*.

The poem, though mediocre, found immediate acceptance, for it was topical and commemorated, of course, the sanguinary battle fought on 13th January, 1849, in the Second Sikh War, when the English lost 2400 killed and wounded in defeating the natives, preliminary to the annexation of the Punjab. A week after sending in his manuscript, Meredith wrote, on 12th June, to Leitch Ritchie, the editor of *Chambers's Journal*, acknowledging acceptance of the poem. He suggested submitting a

[1] See *The Athenæum*, 24th August, 1912.

[2] Upper Ebury Street commenced at Elizabeth Street and ran west to Grosvenor Road. It is now part of Ebury Street, and renumbered. No. 7 Upper Ebury Street would probably now be No. 153 Ebury Street, but this particular house looks as if it had been refronted since 1849.

translation of the life of *Kossuth the Magyar*. Nearly half a year went by, and then, on 30th November, 1849, having made a start with his study of Kossuth, Meredith wrote again to Leitch Ritchie, enclosing four sheet pages of *Kossuth* and some Sonnets on Two Kings of England.

He was also contemplating a sketch of the life of Hermann [1] who had lately died.

For some unexplained reason, the study of Kossuth and the other proposed work never appeared in *Chambers's Journal*; and the many sonnets must have been eventually destroyed in manuscript, though possibly the early poem, *John Lackland*, may be a solitary survivor from the royal galaxy. Meredith, however, preserved no sentimental interest in his early poetry or his first published work, for when, towards the end of his life, Mr C. E. S. Chambers wrote to him, reminding him of his early association with the famous *Journal*, and expressing a hope that they might, perhaps, meet in London, no reply was forthcoming.

At the time he came of age, 1849, Meredith was, of course, exceedingly poor. He had merely the remnant of his mother's small property by way of income, for his literary earnings in this first year of publication could only have amounted to a few pounds. Journalistic " biographers " are very fond of the legend that Meredith started his literary career in London with one guinea and lived entirely on cold porridge. This popular delusion has been succinctly preserved for future use by the brethren of " scissors and paste " thus :

[1] Johann Hermann, 1772–1848, German humanist and Greek scholar.

"There is a legend current in literary circles that Mr Meredith first started his career as a writer in the possession of one guinea. This he invested in a sack of oatmeal. Since he was too poor to buy fuel to cook it, during the whole of the time he wrote his first work, *Evan Harrington*, he subsisted on oatmeal and water, in the form of a most unpalatable drink."

Without doubt a very unpleasant beverage, but there is no reason to believe that Meredith patronised it. The slight discrepancy in the above statement, which places the commencement of his literary career in 1860, when he published his *fifth* work, *Evan Harrington*, renders the rest of the story valueless. Indeed, by 1860 Meredith was a connoisseur in wines, and had the means to offer good vintages to his friends, and always he was, rightly, an appreciator of good food and good cooking. Even as early as 1849, as a member of Charnock's hospitable coterie of friends, he would often be asked out to dine, so the oatmeal fable must be consigned to the limbo of foolish and unprofitable parables invented for our behoof or chastening. Still, it may be granted that Meredith had very little money to spend on himself at this period, and no doubt often went short of rations in his own room at 7 Upper Ebury Street. He was in the bloom of his splendid young manhood, and the long walks in the country he delighted to take must have engendered a healthy appetite that needed substantial appeasement. His footsteps always turned to Surrey, the beautiful county which called to him ever, and where nearly all his subsequent life was to be spent. So, let us picture him, his tall, strong figure crowned by a mass of curly hair (red chestnut in colour then),

striding through Brompton, Chelsea, or Kensington—then distinctive village-like suburbs compact of market gardens and good residential houses—away to the hills and heaths of Surrey.

He was sometimes accompanied on his long walks—even as far as to Brighton—by Edward Gryffydh Peacock,[1] whose acquaintance, as we have seen, he had made through Charnock, and the little manuscript magazine run by the lawyer's friends. And it was at Peacock's rooms, near the British Museum, that on one fateful day Meredith was introduced to his friend's sister, Mary Ellen, the eldest daughter of Thomas Love Peacock, She was a brilliant, witty, beautiful woman, thirty years of age, and a widow. She had married, in 1844, Edward Nicolls, a lieutenant of the Royal Navy, who commanded H.M.S. *Dwarf*; he was drowned at sea four months later, and the posthumous child of the marriage, Edith (subsequently Mrs Clarke), was born in the same year.

Meredith was immediately attracted by Mrs Nicolls and she by him, but the mutual attraction was probably only of a physical nature. Their personal qualities and temperaments and the story of their courtship and disastrous marriage much resemble the similar tragedy of Bulwer Lytton and Rosina Wheeler. Just as the latter declined Bulwer's proposals at first, three or four times according to her own account, so Mrs Nicolls refused Meredith six times. If she had only persisted in her refusal,

[1] Edward Peacock in early life went to sea. He subsequently became a clerk in the East India House, and a barrister. He was a great athlete, a champion sculler, and fond of boxing. He married, and left one son, named Thomas Love Peacock, who was much at Lower Halliford in the Merediths' time as a playmate for Arthur, his cousin.

both would have been saved from an immensity of grievous pain and sorrow. From the material point of view even, there were many objections to the marriage. The disparity in age of nine years' seniority on Mrs Nicolls's side, and the fact that Meredith lacked position, profession, and any income worth considering, might well have made them pause. But he had rare personal gifts and beauty, and Mrs Nicolls, casting discretion aside, yielded to her persistent young admirer. They were married on 9th August, 1849, in St George's Church, Hanover Square, by the Rev. Henry W. Blacket, curate. Meredith was described in the register as of Maddox Street—so he must have moved to lodgings there prior to the ceremony—and son of Augustus Meredith, whose profession was given as " Esquire." The bride was described as of Devonshire Street, and the register was also signed by her father, T. L. Peacock. Probably Peacock's second daughter, Rosa, was also present. She later became Mrs Collinson, and died in 1857, at the age of thirty. His youngest daughter, Margaret, died in 1826, aged three years ; and Peacock wrote for her tombstone in Shepperton Churchyard the poem commencing " Long night succeeds thy little day."

Soon after the marriage, the Merediths went to the Continent on the proceeds of a legacy which had come to George from a relative in Portsmouth ; but they were back in London by November, when they stayed with Thomas Love Peacock at his house, No. 22 John Street, Adelphi.[1] It was from here that Meredith addressed his later letters to Leitch Ritchie, on the subject of his Sonnets and

[1] This is the last house on the north side of John Street, at the corner of Adam Street and facing the Adelphi Hotel.

THE LIMES, WEYBRIDGE. HERE MEREDITH WROTE MUCH OF HIS EARLY WORK AND COMMENCED "THE SHAVING OF SHAGPAT"

Kossuth study. At first the Merediths seem to have been tolerably happy together, just as the Bulwers were in the early years of marriage. They passed their time between Peacock's homes and various lodgings and boarding-houses by the seaside (particularly at Felixstowe and Seaford) and in Surrey. For a considerable time they resided with Mrs Macirone, at The Limes, Weybridge, a pleasant house with a large garden. Mrs Macirone (formerly Miss Elizabeth Williams, of Kew Green) was a woman of considerable culture and charm. She was the widow of Colonel Francis Macirone, A.D.C. to Murat, King of Naples, and a versatile man of inventive powers who was an early pioneer in the study of aviation. Mrs Macirone had two very beautiful daughters, who were, of course, half Italian. The elder, Emilia, as will be seen later, in some degree suggested to Meredith his Emilia Sandra Belloni. Miss Emilia Macirone became the wife of Sir Edmund Hornby, and was later the author of *In and Around Stamboul during the Crimean War*; and her sister Giulia married Major Albert Vaillant, of Meadowleigh, Weybridge. The Limes was an exceedingly pleasant abode for the Merediths, for Mrs Macirone and her daughters knew many interesting people, their guests including Bulwer Lytton; Tom Taylor; Eyre Crowe, A.R.A. (Thackeray's secretary); Samuel Lucas, the journalist; and R. H. Horne, the peculiar author of *Orion* and *A New Spirit of the Age*. With most of these men Meredith became on friendly terms, with some important results; and through the introduction of Tom Taylor he formed an eventful friendship with Sir Alexander Duff Gordon and his wife (a woman of literary and linguistic gifts), who were then living at Nutfield

Cottage, Weybridge. To their daughter Janet (later Mrs Ross), then a little girl about eight years old, Meredith was devoted, and his affectionate regard for her never wavered throughout life. In the early days she gave him the name of "My Poet"; and she has related how Meredith used to take her for long walks, perched on his shoulder, telling her wonderful fairy tales all the way. Meredith loved children. His own little step-daughter, Edith Nicolls, speaking of the time when she was seven years old, says: "He and I were great friends in those early days even. We played cricket together; he was a splendid playfellow."

In the first years of their married life, Meredith and his talented wife found a congenial link in their literary pursuits. They were both writing a good deal of poetry, and sometimes they collaborated. Through R. H. Horne, who was at that time a member of the staff of *Household Words*, Meredith obtained an introduction to Charles Dickens, and it was in this journal that a number of these early poems appeared during a period of six years. Mr B. W. Matz, by means of the contributors' book of *Household Words*, was able to attribute twenty-three poems to Meredith.[1] The two first, *Sorrows and Joys* and *The Two Blackbirds*, appeared in 1850, and the last, *Monmouth*, in 1856. It is possible some of the intervening numbers were the work, wholly or in part, of Mrs Meredith. About this date she and her husband compiled a treatise on Cookery, an art they were both practised in, and of which they were appreciative—as befitted the daughter of Peacock, the Epicurean novelist, and the son and grandson of those Merediths who, as we have seen, were given

[1] See *T. P.'s Weekly*, 17th February, 1911.

to much hospitality and good cooking. In addition to recipes, the work comprised many entertaining notes on domestic management, apt quotations from poetry and prose, and some sapient bits of advice presented to the female sex. Thus :

" A small portion of the time which young Ladies sacrifice to torturing the strings of their Pianoforte, employed in obtaining Domestic Accomplishments, might not make them worse wives, or less agreeable Companions to their Husbands. We hope our fair readers will forgive us for telling them, Economy in a Wife is the most certain Charm to ensure the affection and industry of a husband.

" The Editor has considered the Art of Cookery not merely as a mechanical operation, fit only for working cooks, but as the Analeptic part of the Art of Physic. Philosophers of the highest class, such only, can comprehend its Importance, which amounts to no less, than not only the enjoyment of the present moment, but the more precious advantage of improving health and prolonging life, which depends on duly replenishing the daily waste of the human frame with materials pregnant with nutriment and easy of digestion.

" I have written for those who make Nourishment the chief end of Eating, and do not desire to provoke Appetite beyond the powers and necessities of Nature ; proceeding, however, on the finest Epicurean principles of indulging the Palate, as far as it can be done without injury or offence to the stomach, and forbidding nothing but what is absolutely unfriendly to Health.

" These rules and orders for the regulation of the business of the Kitchen have been extremely

beneficial to the Editor's own Health and Comfort. He hopes they will be equally so to others; they will help those who enjoy health to preserve it; teach those who have delicate and irritable stomachs how to keep them in good temper, and, with a little discretion, enable them to indulge occasionally, not only with impunity but with advantage, in all those alimentary pleasures which a national epicure can desire."

And on the Eternal Servant Question the Editors propounded in the same Johnsonian style:

"Avoid all approaches to Familiarity, which according to a proverb is accompanied by contempt, and soon breaks the neck of obedience. Servants are more likely to be praised into good conduct than scolded into bad, always commend them when they do right, to cherish the desire of pleasing in them you must show them that you are pleased:

> "Be to their faults a little blind,
> And to their virtues very kind."

And they sum up the Cuisine with the couplet:

> "The tender morsels on the palate melt,
> And all the force of Cookery is felt."[1]

To *Fraser's Magazine* for December, 1851, Mrs Meredith had contributed an interesting article entitled *Gastronomy and Civilisation*, tracing the history of cookery from the earliest times, and which gives evidence of such erudition and wide classical reading as to suggest that some aid was rendered by the writer's husband. The article was pessimistic on the matter of contemporary cooking (both in France and England), and methods of serving, and lamented

[1] Mrs Meredith's daughter, Edith (Mrs Clarke), was for many years, until 1919, director of the National Training School of Cookery in Buckingham Palace Road.

the declension of hospitality—a curious commentary in face of the descriptions of Dickens and Thackeray, who have pictured the forties and fifties as a period of much good solid dining and constant hospitality. In the same magazine, 1851 and 1852, appeared two of George Meredith's poems, *Invitation to the Country* and *The Sweet o' the Year*. *Fraser's Magazine* was published by John W. Parker, of West Strand, London, and Meredith had previously arranged with this publisher to produce, at the author's cost, his first book—his collected *Poems, 1851*. Writing to Parker from Weybridge, on 12th December, 1850, Meredith enclosed a selection of completed poems, and a list of others which could be added to the volume. He said he regarded the *Cassandra* as his best work, but that it was not yet finished,[1] and the *Pastorals* as the most original. He expressed himself as willing to abide by Parker's verdict, for a time, to delete any of the poems that might be unsuitable or inferior in workmanship; and added that R. H. Horne had spoken very favourably of those he, Horne, had seen.[2] Like all young authors, Meredith was keenly interested in what he termed the birth and baptism of his first-born of the Muse.

The little volume, now so valuable, of 159 pages, bound in green cloth, was published about 30th June, 1851. It was dedicated "To Thomas Love Peacock, Esq., with the profound admiration and affectionate respect of his son-in-law. Weybridge, May, 1851." Reviews appeared on 5th July in

[1] Apparently *Cassandra* was not completed in time for this volume. It was published with *Modern Love, and Poems of the English Roadside*, 1862.

[2] *Daphne* was sent to R. H. Horne with some poetical lines. See *Letters of George Meredith*, p. 5.

The Leader and *The Speaker*, and others followed. These were not enthusiastic, of course, and the book was not a financial success: how seldom a volume of verse by a new writer ever fares otherwise. Meredith had expended and lost some sixty pounds on his preliminary flight up Parnassus, and he seems to have judged his resultant position, his poetical gifts at that stage of their development, and his future prospects, very fairly. He had received in July a letter in commendation of his book from Charles Ollier,[1] and in reply stated that it was appreciation coming from such a source that made Fame worth seeking for. He was prepared to face the probability that his little volume would meet with injustice and slights, but he was supported by the knowledge that it was the vanguard of better work to come. The poems were the product of his youth, and he did not think they would live beyond

[1] As Charles Ollier was the first writer of note to appreciate George Meredith's work and the first critic to encourage him in his literary path, it may not be supererogatory to recall briefly Ollier's career. This man of many literary friendships was born in 1788. Early in life he, with his brother James, was a publisher in Vere Street. He was the friend of Shelley, Keats, Lamb, Leigh Hunt, Peacock, Harrison Ainsworth, and many other writers. He published for Shelley. In 1829 he was connected with *The New Monthly Magazine*. Later, he was principal reader for Richard Bentley. Charles Ollier was the author of novels entitled *Altham and his Wife* and *Ferrers*, and many contributions to magazines. But, as Ainsworth wrote to Ollier's son: "From circumstances he never achieved the position in literature which he ought to have obtained. He had a fine critical taste, and a genuine relish for the broadest humour, as well as a susceptibility of the tenderest pathos. He had a thoroughly masculine nature, and I never knew a man with a keener sense of existence nor one more alive to the beauties of external nature. He was a lover of art—indeed, a critic in art, and accomplished in music. His conversational powers on all subjects were very great. . . ." Charles Ollier died in 1859, so his encouraging appreciation of Meredith's first work was one of the last episodes in his useful and well-spent life devoted to the best interests of literature.

the purpose of making his name known to those willing to encourage young and earnest students of Nature who were resolved to persevere until they attained the wisdom and inspiration of the true poet.

However, before the year was out, two notable and signed reviews of the *Poems* appeared. In *The Critic* of 15th November, 1851, there was an interesting notice by William Michael Rossetti, who, although but twenty-two years old himself, and a year younger than Meredith, assumed a mentorial attitude of age towards his future friend's work:

"The main quality of Mr Meredith's poems is warmth—warmth of emotion, and, to a certain extent, of imagination. That he is young will be as unmistakably apparent to the reader as to ourself; on which score various shortcomings and crudities, not less than some excess of this attribute, claim indulgence. . . . Scarcely a perceptive, but rather a seeing or sensuous poet. He does not love nature in a wide sense as Keats did; but nature delights and appeals closely to him."

Passing on to note *Love in the Valley*, Mr Rossetti observed:

"Surely, it may be said, there is passion enough here, and of a sufficiently personal kind. . . . It is purely and unaffectedly sensuous, and in its utterance as genuine a thing as can be. We hear a clear voice of nature, with no falsetto notes at all; as spontaneous and intelligible as the wooing of a bird. . . . We have assigned Mr Meredith to the Keatsian

school, believing that he pertains to it in virtue of the more intrinsic qualities of his mind, and of a simple enjoying nature. . . . We do not expect ever quite to enrol Mr Meredith among the demi-gods or heroes; and we hesitate . . . to say that we count on greater things from him; but we shall not cease to look for his renewed appearance with hope, and to hail it with extreme pleasure, so long as he may continue to produce poems equal to the best in this first volume."

This was not an unfair criticism, and coincided to some extent with the views expressed by Meredith himself in the letter to Ollier. But a critic endowed with more prevision—acquired, no doubt, by longer experience—was Charles Kingsley, who, in an article contributed to *Fraser's Magazine* for December, 1851, and entitled *This Year's Song Crop*, wrote thus of Meredith's *Poems*:

"This, we understand, is his first appearance in print; if it be so, there is very high promise in the unambitious little volume which he has sent forth as his first-fruits. It is something to have written already some of the most delicious little love-poems which we have seen born in England in the last few years, reminding us by their riches and quaintness of tone of Herrick; yet with a depth of thought and feeling which Herrick never reached. Health and sweetness are two qualities which run through all these poems. They are often over-loaded—often somewhat clumsy and ill-expressed—often wanting polish and finish; but they are all genuine, all melodiously conceived. . . . In Mr Meredith's *Pastorals*, too, there is a great deal of sweet, whole-

some writing, more like the real pastorals than those of any young poet whom we have had for many a year . . . honest landscape-painting, and only he who begins honestly ends greatly. . . ."

Kingsley's critique was of considerable length, and he gave Meredith much good advice, which the poet, of course, ignored, to the detriment of many later poems. The fact remains that Meredith, with his sensitive and rather unhappy disposition, was disappointed with the results of his first book. He never would speak well of these early verses. He referred to them as rubbish in 1862. And many years later, in 1908, but eight months before his death, he asked M. René Galland to refrain from noticing this first volume of poems, which he termed the worthless immature work of a boy in his teens, and which he hoped was dead and forgotten by the public.[1]

There was an implacable element in Meredith's character. He never forgave what had offended him —not even himself when his work failed to come up to the high standard he had erected. Still, his criticism of his early poetry is unduly severe when

[1] There is an interesting reference to Meredith's *Poems* of 1851 in a letter of William Hardman's, written about ten years later to a friend. This also shows how reticent Meredith was on the subject of his first marriage:

"You will recollect in one of my previous letters, I ventured to presume that our friend Meredith married a daughter of old Mr Peacock, the author of *Gryll Grange*. Well, I knew that Meredith had published a volume of poems in 1851, 300 copies of which he had afterwards destroyed, and they are consequently very scarce. Of course the British Museum have a copy, so I got hold of it rather against G. M.'s wish, why, I know not. The dedication of the volume is 'To Thomas Love Peacock, Esq., this volume is dedicated with the profound admiration and affectionate respect of his son-in-law.' So I was right."

one considers that it included the first version of the exquisite *Love in the Valley*—the poem which, on its original publication in 1851, moved Tennyson to write to Meredith saying how much it charmed him, and that he went about the house repeating its cadences to himself. This from the conspicuous poet who had produced *In Memoriam* the previous year, when also he succeeded Wordsworth as Poet Laureate. Tennyson was then living at Chapel House, Montpelier Row, Twickenham, not far, of course, from the Weybridge district of Surrey, where *Love in the Valley* had its scenic setting. F. T. Palgrave notes in his reminiscences of Tennyson: "In G. Meredith's first little volume he was delighted by the *Love in a Valley* (as printed in 1851: the text in later issues has been greatly changed)." [1]

Meredith, in return, highly praised the earlier verse of Tennyson. He told Mr Clodd: "In *The Lotus Eaters* and *Œnone* (which I could get neither Peacock nor Jefferson Hogg to enjoy) there are lines perfect in sensuous richness and imagery. *The Idylls*, perhaps I should except the *Morte d'Arthur*, will not add to his fame; they are a part of the 'poetical baggage' of which every writer of a large body of verse must be unloaded. Tennyson's rich diction and marvellous singing power cannot be overrated, but the thought is thin; there is no suggestiveness which transcends the expression; nothing is left to the imagination. He gave high praise

[1] The late Rev. H. G. Woods, Master of the Temple, possessed a copy of the second edition of Tennyson's *The Princess*, 1848, which contained on the flyleaf an original manuscript poem of ten lines by George Meredith, and his autograph inscription: "To Cornelia—as the Lady most ambitious and best endowed to take fair Ida for prototype." The book was sold in 1915 for £39.

to my *Love in the Valley*; would like to have been its author."[1]

For some of Tennyson's later work Meredith had severe criticism. He expressed the opinion that *Enoch Arden* pandered to depraved sentimentalism and was badly done. *The Holy Grail* he compared to half yards of satin and figures of Dresden china, and said Tennyson had put up the Muse's clothes-line and strung it with jewellery.

But he greatly admired *Lucretius*, which he described as grand, and in later years he liked Tennyson's *Queen Mary*. Mrs Meynell relates that Meredith said the high-water mark of English style in poetry and prose was reached in Tennyson's "On one side lay the ocean and on one lay a great water, and the moon was full."

It is interesting to note that as late as 1886 Meredith wrote a poem, *The Young Princess*, which displayed unmistakably the influence of Tennyson. This is like the Tennyson of the period of *Maud*, who was begotten of Keats and the Romantics. Despite the harsher notes of most of his later poetry, it is evident that Meredith retained an inner and almost unacknowledged love for the sensuous and mellifluous minstrelsy which sang in *Maud*, *The Princess*, and *The Lotus Eaters*, and in his own *Poems* of 1851.

To return to *Love in the Valley*, R. L. Stevenson also paid a fine tribute to the haunting music of this poem. Writing to W. B. Yeats in 1894, he said:

"Long since when I was a boy I remember the emotions with which I repeated Swinburne's poems and ballads. Some ten years ago a similar spell was cast upon me by Meredith's *Love in the Valley*;

[1] *The Fortnightly Review*, July, 1909.

the stanzas beginning, 'When her mother tends her' haunted me and made me drunk like wine, and I remember waking with them all the echoes of the hills about Hyères."

And York Powell, the Oxford historian, described *Love in the Valley* as "the most gorgeous piece of rhythmical work and passion. . . . Meredith has *invented* his great metres."

Leslie Stephen, too, loved the poem, and knew it by heart. Both Stevenson and York Powell may have been more familiar with the later version of the poem than the original form which moved Tennyson to admiration. As is well known, Meredith rewrote and added many stanzas to *Love in the Valley* when it was republished in *Macmillan's Magazine*, October, 1878. It is ever matter for surprise and regret that he omitted those last lines of the original poem which hymn the coming of Spring so beautifully.

On the other hand, the second version contained many improvements and new stanzas of infinite beauty, particularly the oft-quoted word-picture in the fifth verse.

Despite his condemnation of the early poems, Meredith, at the back of his mind, doubtless exempted *Love in the Valley*, for we find him writing, in 1907, to Mrs Sturge Henderson, to whose book on Meredith Mr Basil de Sélincourt contributed some chapters dealing with the subject's poetry, protesting mildly against the charge of *preciosity* in *Love in the Valley*.

It is, of course, a partial truism that an artist—particularly a literary artist—is a bad judge of what constitutes his best work. Certainly Dickens and

Thackeray were exceptions to the rule, for each was fully aware of the superlative merits of, respectively, *David Copperfield* and *Vanity Fair*. But such personal perspicacity is rare, and Meredith rather lacked it. His literary judgments were generally in dissonance with public opinion—and even critical opinion—and in the case of his own work he favoured his later poetry, which to the majority will always be difficult and therefore unpopular. The early poems, if artless and unpolished, were lyrical : this can scarcely be said of the later poems—such as are contained in *A Reading of Life*—and the odes dealing with French history, which leave a sabulous taste on the literary palate : a more saccharine tooth frankly admits preference for *Love in the Valley* and *Beauty Rohtraut*. Surely the supreme charms of poetry, regarded as a symbol or expression of Beauty, are its musical cadences which attune the mind to the thoughts desired, and its art of painting a mental picture : profound ideas and didactic philosophy are better expressed in stately prose. Meredith's early poems supply unsophisticated tonal pleasures in full measure ; and what beautiful pictures of twilight and night are those in the *Pastorals*. The fifth is not unworthy of comparison with Gray's *Elegy*, by which it was obviously inspired, though the young poet chose to dispense with rhymes. Years later, Meredith showed his friend, William Hardman, the scene which suggested these *Pastorals* and the spot where he wrote them—an eminence surrounded by pines on the St George's Hill Estate, between Weybridge and Byfleet. Hardman notes : " Meredith and I had an argument as to whether he ought not to have made the second and fourth line to rhyme, and I think he convinced

me that the plan he had adopted was the better one."

In the delightful *Robin Redbreast* the last stanza conjures up a picture of young Meredith in the garden of a Surrey cottage, for after leaving The Limes he and his wife lived for a time in a rustic red-brick cottage near the parish schools at Weybridge.

In striking contrast to this poem are *Will o' the Wisp*, with its elfin lilts, and the remarkable *London by Lamplight*, which has an elusive suggestion of the impressionist poets of forty years later, together with romantic word painting in rapid antithesis. Here is " an influence strange and swift as dreams, a whispering of old romance " ; and so there is, in another sense, in the beautiful and musical ballad of *Beauty Rohtraut*, translated from the German of Möricke. It was first published in *The Leader* for September, 1850, and deservedly found a place in *Illustrated British Ballads*, 1881, with an illustration drawn by Henry Marriott Paget.

How fine, too, is Meredith's first expression of his lifelong love of the South-West Wind in the poem of that name. This was an earlier form of *Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn* (1862), which contains many similar thoughts and Nature pictures, as a comparison of the two pieces will demonstrate. But the finest exposition of Meredith's Nature worship and his kinship with things of air and woodland to be found in the early *Poems* is the third Pastoral.

That was the first verse of the life-song whose last lines were to be written nearly sixty years later, in 1908, when the singer was within a few months of death—*Youth in Age*.

Apart from the fact that work which contains so

much of beauty and music can never merit oblivion, the early *Poems* of George Meredith have their fitting and important place in the history of his mental development, and are thereby secure of remembrance.

CHAPTER IV

"THE SHAVING OF SHAGPAT." HALLIFORD AND SEAFORD DAYS. "THE HOUSE ON THE BEACH." "FARINA." DOMESTIC TRAGEDY AND "MODERN LOVE"

ANOTHER lost year in the record of Meredith's life is 1852. He must, however, have been planning and commencing *The Shaving of Shagpat*, for he once told Mr Clodd it was written "at Weybridge with duns at the door." He was also conceiving *Richard Feverel*, but both works were completed elsewhere. It is interesting to note, in confirmation of the fact that Meredith was really contemporary with, and one of the band of, the great Victorian writers, that in this same year, 1852-1853, which saw the dawn of these two masterpieces, appeared Dickens's *Bleak House*, Thackeray's *Esmond* and *The Newcomes*, Kingsley's *Hypatia*, Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, Lytton's *My Novel*, Mrs Gaskell's *Cranford*, and novels by the lesser lights, Charles Lever, Harrison Ainsworth, G. P. R. James, Frank Smedley, and Surtees. Browning and Tennyson, too, were producing fine poetry, so young Meredith had a noble band of rivals in the field of literary endeavour.

In 1853 he and his wife removed from Weybridge to the opposite side of the river, Lower Halliford, to live, for a time, with Mrs Meredith's father, Thomas Love Peacock, whose wife, Jane Gryffydh, had died the previous year. Peacock was now sixty-eight

Thomas Love Peacock

years of age, with the most important events of his life behind him. His earlier years he had passed in literary dalliance, and his famous friendship with Shelley commenced in 1812. He accompanied the poet and Harriet to Edinburgh in 1813; and when Shelley was at Windsor and Marlow, where also Peacock was then living, in 1816, the two men were constantly together. To Peacock, Shelley's fine letters from Italy were addressed, and it was this friend who endeavoured to bring about the production of *The Cenci* at Covent Garden Theatre. The first of the delightful series of Peacock's novels, *Headlong Hall*, appeared in 1816, and the last, *Gryll Grange*, in 1860. Those known to Shelley were much admired by him, including *Nightmare Abbey*, wherein he was amusingly satirised; possibly the author depicted himself as Mr Glowry, for that "very consolate widower" held "that there was but one good thing in the world, *videlicet*, a good dinner"—which was certainly one of the articles of Peacockian belief. The charm of Peacock's novels is increased by the poems and songs scattered through them, *Melincourt* being particularly rich in this respect. In 1819 he became an official at the East India House, and a confrère there of Charles Lamb. Peacock's long association with Lower Halliford commenced in 1822, and he remained faithful to this part of Shepperton until his death, in 1866. His house, in reality two cottages connected by a passage, was only separated from his beloved Thames by a strip of garden, on to which his long, low-ceiled sitting-room opened.

In this house, now called Elmbank, was born, on 13th June, 1853, George Meredith's son and Peacock's grandson, Arthur Gryffydh Meredith, his second

name being that of his maternal grandmother. Possibly he was named Arthur after his father's first cousin, Arthur Ellis, then Adjutant at Woolwich, and available as a sponsor. Several children had been born to the Merediths earlier, and died as infants: this was the only child of the marriage who survived to any age: he was destined to bring his parents much joy and, later, great sorrow.

It was soon found that this joint residence was not altogether a successful arrangement. Peacock was getting old, and liked quiet and a domestic régime that ran on oiled wheels of comfort. His infant grandson was, no doubt, in accordance with the immemorial habits of the genus, exigent in his claims upon the time and attentions of the females of the household, and given to making melody of a timbre not appreciated by bachelors and elderly widowers. Further, it has to be stated that although George Meredith had a profound admiration for the literary work of Peacock, and shared his taste for good cooking and good wine, the two men had not much in common in other respects. Meredith was never easy to live with, and his highly-strung temperament and nervous, restless habits—humming snatches of song the while he strode about the narrow rooms of the house, or fidgeted with ornaments and furniture—worried his comfort-loving father-in-law. Consequently Peacock took another little house for the Merediths just across the way on the opposite side of the pleasant Green at Lower Halliford. It was here, Vine Cottage, in the small front room nearest to the entrance, that Meredith finished *The Shaving of Shagpat*. His recreations in this quiet and rural spot took the form of playing cricket with his little step-daughter and other

THE HOUSE ON LOWER HALLIFORD GREEN WHERE MEREDITH LIVED IN 1854-1855, AND HERE HE FINISHED "THE SHAVING OF SHAGPAT"

children on the Green in front of the cottage, and his customary long walks through Surrey, when he stored up many impressions of Nature and scenery which found expression in the novels and poems of the years to come.

The Shaving of Shagpat was published by Chapman and Hall at the close of 1855 (though bearing 1856 on the title-page), and in the author's prefatory note, dated December 8th, 1855, he opined that the only way to tell an Arabian story was by imitating the style and manners of the Oriental story-tellers. But as such an attempt might read like a translation, he thought it better to preface his Entertainment by an avowal that it came from no Eastern source, but was in every respect an original work.

And yet this wonderful work of art, original and distinctive, though as picturesque and gorgeous as *The Arabian Nights*, and far transcending Beckford's *Vathek*, achieved no success at the outset. Indeed the first edition sold badly, and was eventually disposed of as a remainder, according to rumour, although the reviews had been quite favourable. It is of interest to recall that two of these notices were written by George Eliot, who had not then attained her own fame, for it was not until 1857 that her *Scenes of Clerical Life* were published. George Eliot was at this period living at No. 8 Parkshot, Richmond. She had some slight personal acquaintance with Meredith, and read his book directly it appeared, for she noted in her diary for 30th December, 1855 : "Read *The Shaving of Shagpat* (George Meredith's)." Her first review of the work appeared in *The Leader* for 5th January, 1856, in the course of which she said :

"*The Shaving of Shagpat* is a work of genius, and of poetical genius. It has none of the tameness which belongs to mere imitations manufactured with servile effort or thrown off with sinuous facility. It is no patchwork of borrowed incidents. Mr Meredith has not simply imitated Arabian fictions, he has been inspired by them; he has used Oriental forms, but only as an Oriental genius would have used them who had been 'to the manner born.' . . . In one particular, indeed, Mr Meredith differs widely from his models, but that difference is a high merit; it lies in the exquisite delicacy of his love incidents and love scenes. In every other characteristic—in exuberance of imagery, in picturesque wildness of incident, in significant humour, in aphoristic wisdom, *The Shaving of Shagpat* is a new Arabian Night. To two-thirds of the reading world this is sufficient recommendation."

Writing to Miss Sara Hennell, on 18th January, 1856, George Eliot said: "If you want some idle reading get *The Shaving of Shagpat*, which I think you will say deserves all the praise I gave it." Her second notice of the book appeared, in April, in *The Westminster Review*, a periodical she had previously assisted in editing. In view of George Eliot's appreciation and kindly help in these early days, it is unfortunate that Meredith was not more grateful in his estimate of her. It is true that he once wrote of the author of *Adam Bede* as the greatest of female writers. But in that case Meredith must have had a poor opinion of female writers in general, for, as J. Comyns Carr recorded: "For George Eliot's achievement he never professed more than a strictly limited respect. Her more pretentious literary

methods failed to impress him, and there were times when the keenness of his hostile criticism bordered upon scorn. I remember when someone in his presence ventured to remark that George Eliot, 'panoplied in all the philosophies, was apt to swoop upon a commonplace,' he hailed the criticism with the keenest enjoyment, and half-laughingly declared that he would like to have forged the phrase himself." And on another occasion he said to Mr Clodd: "George Eliot had the heart of Sappho; but the face, with the long proboscis, the protruding teeth as of the Apocalyptic horse, betrayed animality." But Meredith, probably, never contemplated the careful preservation and publication of these post-prandial witticisms and criticisms, or he would scarcely have committed himself to such an absurd literary judgment as this: "Not much of Dickens will live, because it has so little correspondence to life. He was the incarnation of cockneydom, a caricaturist who aped the moralist; he should have kept to short stories. If his novels are read at all in the future, people will wonder what we saw in them, save some possible element of fun meaningless to them. The world will never let Mr Pickwick, who is to me full of the lumber of imbecility, share honours with Don Quixote." [1] If such a thing were possible, a plebiscite on this point a century hence would be of interest. To-day it would probably be found that where ten people prefer *Don Quixote*, fifty would vote for the greater pleasure they have found in *Pickwick*; and there would not be absent some who consider Cervantes's masterpiece a greatly

[1] *The Fortnightly Review*, July, 1909. On the other hand, Meredith wrote, in 1899, to Mrs Meynell, concerning her article on Dickens, that he was converted by her pleading and owned that Dickens had merits beyond Cockney realms.

overrated work. Another of Meredith's perverse literary judgments concerned Gray, whose famous *Elegy* was alluded to as *The Undertaker's Waltz.*

To return to *The Shaving of Shagpat.* It will ever be matter for debate and divided opinion as to how much of allegory is contained in that immortal fantasy. At first, Meredith denied that the work contained any allegorical signification, as can be seen in his note to the second edition (which also contained the fine drawing by his friend, Frederick Sandys, of " Bhanavar the Beautiful "), for he said there the allegory must be rejected altogether.

But writing in 1906 to the Rev. James McKechnie, who has expounded his own reading of the allegorical significance of *The Shaving of Shagpat* in book form very ably, Meredith certainly modified his original disclaimer. He said that as an allegory was objectionable to the English he had given his attempt garments to conceal its body, but both that and its signification failed, for but very few of his friends cared to read the book and only two of them gave it a word of praise. In another letter to Mrs Bovill,[1] 1892, he admitted Shagpat did wear a kind of allegory in the form of a loose dressing-gown, but he had been so abused for writing the book that he wished to forget all about it and its possible allegorical meaning.

All readers of the original work should study Mr McKechnie's most interesting exposition of *The Shaving of Shagpat,* even though they may not see, eye to eye with him, the profundities of allegory and symbolism and philosophy he presents for consideration. Personally, I think Meredith intended his book to be primarily an opulent and gorgeous

[1] Now the Hon. Mrs Richard Grosvenor.

piece of romantic story-telling ; and having adopted the Eastern method and setting, artistic considerations impelled a certain amount of allegory and symbolism, as in *The Arabian Nights* and all Eastern stories. Allegory of an obvious kind there certainly is in *The Shaving of Shagpat.* Its finest portion, " The Story of Bhanavar the Beautiful," is simply a superlatively picturesque version of the world-old parable of the temptation of Woman by the Serpent, and how she immolates Love on the Altar of Beauty and Ambition, and sends lovers to death for the gain of a jewel. And the quest for the mystic Sword of Aklis, with the preliminary tests and trials of the Well of Paravid, the magic Horse Garraveen, and the Lily of the Enchanted Sea ; the Wiles of Rabesqurat ; the Pit of the Roc ; and the fatal lures of the Palace of Aklis—all these suggest analogy with Bunyan's immortal Allegory, for in both stories the Attainment of the Ideal is only achieved by passing through much temptation and pain. Endurance for Victory.

Mr McKechnie suggested that Meredith would have reached supreme heights as an allegorist if he had been encouraged to continue his work on these lines : " I am prepared to believe that on none of his works did Meredith, to begin with, build such high hopes as on *The Shaving of Shagpat*, and that to the keenness with which he felt the shattering of those hopes is due the fact that though the heart of his genius lay in that direction he never wrote another allegory."

It is certainly matter for regret that Meredith never pursued his course further as an Eastern story-teller, for if *The Shaving of Shagpat* be considered merely as a fantasque tale it is in the front

rank of that category. Take the scene where Bhanavar calls the serpents to her aid. Mrs Ross records that Meredith had the idea of this story of the Queen of the Serpents suggested to him by the tales of a certain M. de Haxthausen, whom he met at the Duff Gordons' house, Nutfield Cottage, Weybridge: "He had fought with the Queen of the Serpents, whose crown he wore in a little red silk bag that hung round his neck from a gold chain. With flashing eyes and vehement gestures he described how he fought with the Queen. 'She called her subjects to her aid with loud, shrill hisses, and the earth became alive with snakes. I killed, and I killed, and I killed, and then ran for my life out of the burning hot gully, followed by hundreds of gliding, writhing, venomous creatures. The owner of this crown is the ruler and the head of all the serpents,' said he, proudly tossing his head. By dint of much persuasion, M. de Haxthausen was induced to show his treasure, which was inside a small gold box in the red silk bag. It looked like a miniature crown fashioned out of dark amber, and a doctor, who was present, said, after careful examination, that it undoubtedly was a bony excrescence from a reptile, and probably from the head. M. de Haxthausen was uneasy until his crown was once more safely hung round his neck, and said it had not been taken out of the gold box for more than twenty years. Meredith never took his eyes off M. de Haxthausen while he told his weird tale, and when next he brought me home he told me a marvellous story about the Queen of the Serpents, which was afterwards developed into Bhanavar the Beautiful in *The Shaving of Shagpat*."

And what vivid word-painting, too, conjures up

the Genie Karaz at a touch; but that final scene of the great conflict in the air between Karaz and Shibli Bagarag (mounted on the league-long wings of Koorookh as the moon sits on the midnight) is almost too overcharged with wild imaginative descriptions of fantastic happenings—a pagan apocalypse.

The wealth of simile in this story is prodigal. When Meredith was asked by H. M. Hyndman what suggested his particular comparison of a woman to a palm-tree, he replied: "The hair falling over her shoulders and her slender shape." Throughout this work picture succeeds picture. There is a fine one of sunset blending with moonrise.

In amusing contrast are little saws of Eastern philosophy, and following the Eastern fashion too, there are many snatches of song and illustrative verse in *The Shaving of Shagpat.* One has a distinct echo of Tennyson's *Tears, Idle Tears,* which had appeared a few years earlier (1847). It is in the pathetic scene of the death of Zurvan, when, with dimming eyes, he sighs, and sings to Bhanavar.

Enough has been said to demonstrate that *The Shaving of Shagpat* can be read either for the pleasure it gives as a story of romance and magic or as a profound and subtle allegory; and it is this element of elusiveness and mystery, truly Eastern in character, which enhances in no small degree the piquant charm of Meredith's solitary excursion into the enchanted realm of faery.

During 1856 and 1857 the Merediths were living mostly at Seaford, then a dull and stagnant little place (as it was even thirty years later, when fowls promenaded the grass-grown streets with leisured calm), with the nearest railway station at Newhaven —another Stygian "seaport." But the glorious

range of Sussex Downs at the back were an immense attraction to Meredith, the mighty walker of those days. Further, he had here the society of a friend he much appreciated, Maurice FitzGerald, who owned property at Seaford. Son of the eccentric and religiously fanatical John Purcell FitzGerald, of Boulge Hall, Suffolk, and nephew of Edward FitzGerald, the translator of *Omar Khayyam*, Maurice FitzGerald was at this period, though only just of age, the ideal bachelor. Sir Francis Burnand, whose intimate friendship with him commenced at Trinity College, Cambridge, has described him as "a first-rate scholar,[1] a gentle Sybarite, and a skilled *gourmet*." Violent sports and long walks he disliked, so literature and the art of cuisine were the bonds that united him to Meredith, who gave him the name of "The Young Mauritius" and took this friend as the model for The Wise Youth in *Richard Feverel*. In these pleasant days at Seaford the Merediths and FitzGerald used to lodge at Marine Terrace with the village carpenter and wheelwright, Richard Ockenden by name, whose wife was a wonderful cook—and the chief attraction for a prolonged stay in Sussex. Mrs Ockenden's culinary fame has been recorded by her distinguished lodger's pen in several places. In a dialogue sent to Miss Janet Duff Gordon, FitzGerald voices the nice considerations of one of the Ockenden dinners (for, as Sir Francis Burnand states, "his well-thought-out arrangement of every meal, breakfast, lunch, and dinner, was the result of calm study, guided by such sound common-sense"), whilst Meredith himself enacts "Poet."

[1] FitzGerald translated *The Crowned Hippolytus* of Euripides, among other work.

MARINE TERRACE, SEAFORD, WRERE MEREDITH FREQUENTLY STAYED IN 1856-1858, AND IN 1863. HERE HE WROTE "FARINA" AND PART OF "RICHARD FEVEREL." THE PLACE IS DESCRIBED IN "THE HOUSE ON THE BEACH"

But Mrs Ockenden's fame is chiefly preserved in Meredith's excellent little story, *The House on the Beach*, wherein she and her husband figure under the slightly changed name of Crickledon, the village carpenter and his wife, with whom lodged the Van Diemen Smiths and Herbert Fellingham at Crikswich, which place is, of course, intended for Seaford. In Fellingham may be detected some resemblance to Meredith himself with his qualities of satire and laughter, his similar profession and pleasures—such as a long walk and a good dinner to follow.

Although *The House on the Beach* was not published until 1877 (in *The New Quarterly Magazine*), it was commenced some sixteen years earlier, in the days when Meredith frequently stayed at Seaford. Writing to Mrs Ross in May, 1861, he mentioned three literary works he then had in hand: *Emilia Belloni*; *A Woman's Battle* (*Rhoda Fleming*?); and *Van Diemen Smith*—which he said was interesting as a story. It is a most entertaining story, too. The absurd Mr Tinman, with his bad wines, is an early study in egoism, a subject later to be developed so consummately. Truly humorous is this precious person's practice preliminary in the delivery of his Address to the Throne when his sister Martha sat vice-regally to receive his loyal congratulations; and truly mordant is the brush which paints the picture of melancholy little Seaford.

Apparently, Meredith, having commenced and then laid aside *Van Diemen Smith* in 1861, was induced to resume and complete the tale on hearing of the Great Flood at Seaford in 1876, an incident which forms the dramatic *dénouement* of *The House on the Beach*. During this encroachment of the

sea, Richard Ockenden's wheelwright shop, adjoining Marine Terrace, was much damaged, and his timber floated about as battering rams, one great wheel entering a house in Marine Terrace. The news of Neptune's escapades at the expense of old friends gave Meredith the suggestion for the remarkable ending of his story of Seaford as he knew it sixty years ago.

Seaford and gastronomy were ever allied, and consequently, on the strength of the cook, Meredith entertained many visitors during his sojourns in Sussex, including one of his aunts and her son, which seems to have been the last occasion on which he had any intercourse with his blood relations of the older generation. There is an invitation to Eyre Crowe, A.R.A., which gives a good idea of Meredith's life at Seaford, which, for recreation, included boating, bathing, fishing, long walks and picnics.

Meredith spent Christmas of 1856 alone at Seaford. He remained on as he was busy with literary work. Here he wrote *Farina* and some further portion of *Richard Feverel*, for, writing to Edward Chapman, of the firm of Chapman and Hall, who were the publishers of the last-named work, he said, in December, 1856, that despite the appalling dullness of Seaford he could work better there than in any other place, and that he was resolved to remain in Sussex till his book was concluded. The name of his novel he then decided was to be *The Fair Frankincense* — which no doubt adumbrated the sacrifice of Lucy Feverel. He also asked to be supplied with books dealing with the dialect and local provincial ballads of Hampshire, which were probably required for the evolving of Farmer Blaize,

Tom Bakewell, and the Bantam in the pages of *Richard Feverel.*

The spring of 1857 found Meredith still at Seaford ; and in the autumn of this year *Farina : a Legend of Cologne* was published by Smith, Elder and Co.[1] This short romance met with no initial success financially, and it has never been widely popular among admirers of Meredith's later work. Even George Eliot, who reviewed the story in *The Westminster Review*, October, 1857, despite her desire to help Meredith, admitted some disappointment in the matter of *Farina* as a story. And as for the style and grammar she said : " The author has sacrificed euphony, and almost sense, to novelty and force of expression "— an early example of tilting at Meredithese, which became quite a cult with later generations of critics. Still, George Eliot concluded : " *Farina* is both an original and an entertaining book, and will be read with pleasure by all who prefer a lively, spirited story to those dull analyses of dull experiences in which the present school of fiction abounds."

A liking, or the reverse, for *Farina* is entirely a matter of individual taste. Those who desire an analytic and philosophic novel can leave it unopened : but those who like a Gothic romance, with a dash of demonology and ghosts, can read it with pleasure and find a welcome niche for the volume beside Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, Lewis's *Monk*, Mrs Radcliffe's *Italian*, and that fascinating volume of 1826 entitled *Legends of Terror and Tales of the Wonderful and the Wild*, to say nothing of the essays in the same school of romance by Walter Scott, G. P. R. James, and Harrison Ainsworth. The

[1] A presentation copy, from the author, of this first edition has realised £24 in the sale-room.

supernatural scenes in *Farina* are not very successful and convincing, because they are not treated impressively or with due seriousness: ghosts and humour never blend well. The best parts of the book are those describing the doings of Werner and his men, either in Cologne or in the Robber Baron's castle. There are picturesque descriptions of old Cologne and the Rhine, and the vivid presentment of the storm on the Drachenfels is worthy to rank with the magnificent storm in Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit*; with that in Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*; with that in De Morgan's *An Affair of Dishonour*; and with those to be found in the romances of Ainsworth—pre-eminently the word-painter of storms.

The year 1858 brought tragedy to Meredith at Seaford. For some time past the brief happiness of his marriage had been overclouded. The bitter analogy with the Bulwer Lyttons' disastrous marriage was complete. In each case husband and wife were too much alike in temperament and character and gifts to find permanent happiness together: if one partner in either of the inauspicious unions could have submitted to the stronger will of the other, final catastrophe might have been avoided. But Meredith and his wife were equally strong-willed, equally talented. Both were highly-strung, nervous, emotional, restless in mind and body. Both were hot in temper, satirical and violent in argument and dispute, quick to imagine offence. Consequently, peace was never of long continuance in that unhappy "home" in lodgings. Terrible quarrels and scenes took place, and yet in their own strange way these two sad people had loved each other.

In 1858 came the irreparable breach, when Mrs Meredith went to Capri with Henry Wallis, the painter. He found her alone at Seaford, in difficulties and debt and distress of heart. He helped her—and she yielded. But the poor woman never found happiness, and her short tragic life was nearing the end. She seems to have had a prevision that death was approaching, for she constantly repeated aloud certain verses which she said she desired to have inscribed on her tombstone. Ever restless, she wandered from place to place, seeking to drown bitter memories and regrets. Her supreme sorrow was the loss of her little son, Arthur Meredith, now five years old, who had, of course, been claimed by his father : the passionate devotion of both parents to the child was intense, and deepened the tragedy. The unhappy mother, in the hope of seeing her son, returned to England in 1859, and lived at 4 Crown Crescent (just opposite Orleans House), Twickenham.

All those who remember Mrs Meredith in the last years of her life state that she was always sad and constantly in tears. Her warm, vehement nature could not meet sorrow with resignation, or be softened by it. She would pace up and down the room in uncontrollable emotion. She treasured up every little relic that had belonged to her son, and always wore a lock of his hair against her heart.

Mrs Meredith went to Seaford again, and to Hastings, but in 1860 she was living at 2 Sussex Villas, Cambrian Road, Richmond Hill. Like her husband, she seems to have been devoted to Surrey, and her last home was at Grotto Cottage, Oatlands Park, Weybridge—not far from where she had spent the first years of her married life with Meredith. Here she died in October, 1861, at the age of forty-one.

The curious analogy between the tragic fate of Lady Lytton and that of Mrs Meredith was preserved to the end. Lady Lytton died alone, with no relatives near, and devoted friends were her only mourners. She desired that the text, "The Lord shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve," should be placed over her grave. But no tombstone has ever been erected over the spot where she lies in the churchyard of Shirley, Surrey (though her name is recorded on the neighbouring vault of her friend, Miss Devey). Mrs Meredith died alone, and her only mourners were a Mr Howse, and a Miss Bennett, and her former maid, Jane Wells. No tombstone has ever been placed over her grave, and the spot, to the left, near the top of the main path in the churchyard of Weybridge, Surrey, is not marked even by a grass mound. The lines which she hoped might have been inscribed over her grave were these:

Come not, when I am dead,
To drop thy foolish tears upon my grave,
To trample round my fallen head,
And vex the unhappy dust thou wouldst not save.
There let the wind sweep and the plover cry;
But thou, go by.

. . . . . .

I am sick of Time,
And I desire to rest.
Pass on, weak heart, and leave me where I lie:
Go by, go by.

Thus ended the sad life of Mary Ellen Meredith. There is no condemnation for her, for, whatever her errors, they were blotted out by her tears. Meredith himself never blamed her, for he realised his own share in the mistakes and misunderstandings that

finally led to ruin. All he permitted himself to say was : " No sun warmed my roof-tree ; the marriage was a blunder ; she was nine years my senior." And " Peacock's wife became mad, and so there was a family taint." But these words do not explain all. Meredith, after his bitter experience, subjected himself to a rigorous mental examination, and the expression of his regret and remorse is to be found in *Modern Love*, written soon after his wife's death. In that fine poem can be traced the whole and gradual course of his marriage tragedy.

The whole tragedy of Meredith's first marriage was a grievous experience for such an acutely sensitive and proud spirit. The iron entered into his soul, and, for some years after, he eschewed the love of women. His attitude to the sex at this time is expressed in a letter to a friend, Bonaparte Wyse, wherein he caustically asserts that women in their physical attributes approximate to the vegetable creation, and that morally they are no better than the animal ; consequently in a chemical sense they were beneficial to the other sex. He added that he respected a good many women and did not hate any, but all the same he hoped he would never fall in love with one. In chapter xxii. of *Richard Feverel* woman is also compared to the vegetable creation, and in another passage (subsequently suppressed in later editions) to a wild cat. In *Rhoda Fleming* also, chapter xxviii., Edward Blancove inveighs against the animal vagaries of the sex.

But this caustic mood was only a passing phase, and, a few years later, with a new and happier female influence came a complete revolution of views.

CHAPTER V

"THE ORDEAL OF RICHARD FEVEREL." ESHER AND COPSHAM DAYS

AFTER his marriage debacle, Meredith returned to London with his son Arthur, who was now, and for the next six years, the idol of his life, the object on whom he showered all the wealth of his love; for his sensitive and stricken heart, in the first bitterness of domestic tragedy, recoiled, as we have just seen, from any intimate association with the other sex. They lodged at 7 Hobury Street,[1] Chelsea; and it was in this rather drab house, a typical London building in the second-rate style of its period, that *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* was resumed and completed in the course of a year.[2] The story was published in 1859 by Chapman and Hall, and attracted more attention at the outset than the author's previous works had secured.

[1] Mr Clodd has stated it was at No. 7; but Mr Thomas Seccombe, on the authority of two old friends of Meredith, changed the number to 8 in his memoir of Meredith in *The Dictionary of National Biography*.

[2] It was probably during this period that Meredith and Arthur also visited Lynmouth, for Mr F. B. Barwell recollects meeting the two there about the year 1859. He had previously met Meredith, about 1855, at the table of Mrs Edward Chapman. Mr Barwell states: "I was staying in lodgings at Lynmouth. Meredith and his boy came to stay there, and he and one or two other men often spent an evening together at my rooms, and his conversation was very amusing and often witty. Meredith had his boy with him at Lynmouth but no nurse, for he considered that a good lad who could wash and dress the child was better than a woman. He was himself devoted to the little fellow, whom I often saw with his boy-nurse. Many years later I went to see Meredith near Dorking. I asked him which of his books I should recommend to a young Russian who knew a good deal of our literature, and he said *The Egoist* as the best specimen."

ARTHUR MEREDITH AND HIS STEP-SISTER, EDITH NICOLLS
(MRS. CLARKE)

The Times gave a three-column review.[1] In this book, of course, Meredith first found himself. His previous essays in fantasy and the supernatural not having proved popular and financial successes—for in those days he was compelled to remember he was writing for a living—he turned to a deeper seam in his mental equipment, and produced the first of his philosophic novels, wherein the study of character and actions predominated over incident and adventure, which had been the bases, combined with some allegoric intention, of *The Shaving of Shagpat* and *Farina*. *Richard Feverel* had some notable contemporaries, for this year, 1859, also witnessed the first appearance of *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Adam Bede*, *Idylls of the King*, and *The Virginians*—a memorable year in the history of English literature.

As in many of Meredith's stories, one can trace some autobiographic reflections in *Richard Feverel*. The hero in boyhood is not unlike what his creator was during the same period. Proud and handsome and elusive, Richard also had his religious-propagandist phase (when, in addition to the heathen round and in Raynham Abbey, he tried to convert Adrian Harley !). Next came his imaginative sojourn in the land of romance and beauty ; and perhaps that scene where Sir Austin Feverel makes the boy burn his manuscript literary lucubrations may have had its origin in Portsmouth days and account for that lack of affection and sympathy with which Meredith treated *his* father. The sub-title of the book is *A History of Father and Son*. Lady Feverel's case resembles that of Meredith's wife and her sorrows. The tinker's philosophy, in the chapter entitled "The Magian Conflict," concerning the wisdom of pre-

[1] October 14th, 1859.

ferring tobacco to a wife, finds an echo in the poem of *The Beggar's Soliloquy*, written not long after.

Dissatisfaction will probably always be expresssed by each generation that reads the book at the tragic *dénouement*. Poor Lucy deserved a better reward after her long martyrdom.[1] It may be fatalistic in the classical style, and a tribute to the author's art that he can so acutely arouse in the reader's mind distaste and irritation at the fate of his creations, but the fact remains that the double tragedy of the story serves no purpose. If in the weaving of Richard's destiny by Fate it was necessary for him to cause the deaths of the two women who loved him best, the result should have been portrayed. But we are not told what was the ultimate effect upon his character. He felt remorse, at the time, for the untimely end of Clare, and grief for that of Lucy; but what of the after years of this ridiculous " hero " —victim of a ridiculous System? Which had him in the end—the sorrowful experiences of his Ordeal or the System? If ever a novel with a purpose called for a sequel it was *Richard Feverel*.

I think all the critics of this book have overlooked the proposition that, in addition to tilting at absurd Systems of Education, Meredith was attacking the conventional hero of fiction at that time. Richard Feverel had many brethren born a few years earlier. Those unpleasant young men, masterful and muscular, with their curling hair and curling lips; their proud, quivering nostrils; their high-flown schemes to redeem the world; their drastic thrashings and slayings (in duels) of hapless males " who cross their path "; their quixotic chivalry, but despotic, heart-

[1] As *The Times* reviewer said, Meredith deserved " to be haunted by the ghost of his most beautiful creation."

less treatment of the unfortunate women they "love"—they figure in almost every novel of the early Victorian period. They abound in Dickens—James Steerforth, John Westlock, Nicholas Nickleby, Eugene Wrayburn, Edwin Drood. They were idealised by Lytton, heroised by the author of *Guy Livingstone*, and brought to a fine art by Frank Smedley, whose vivid creations of Lewis Arundel, Harry Oaklands, and Harry Coverdale enable us to examine the popular hero of the forties and fifties at his best or worst. And even the satiric Thackeray used the mould for Clive Newcome. The elderly monsters of the Brontës were preferable to these impossible young men.

Sir Austin Feverel, another and earlier Egoist, bears some resemblance to Mr Dombey, for both men, cold and remote to the world, centred their deep affections ardently upon an only son, in each case destined to disappoint parental hopes, each the victim of an absurd system. Dombey's faulty armour was pierced by Edith, Sir Austin's by Lady Blandish. Another Dickensian influence may be traced in Mrs Berry, who is certainly a younger, and much more refined, sister of Mrs Gamp, and a cousin of Mrs Lupin, Peggotty, Polly Richards, and others. All these good women, of course, were lineal descendants of the nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*. Mrs Berry is particularly Gampian at the wedding, and when she visits Lucy in the Isle of Wight and descants on the advent of the heir of the Feverels.

If Mrs Berry was one half Dickens, undoubtedly the other half was Mrs Ockenden, of Seaford. This was, of course, Meredith's first presentment of that famous cook who, as we have seen, enchained him so long in the dismal little town where her lodgings

were situated, and who reappeared a few years later as Mrs Crickledon in *The House on the Beach.* Mrs Berry's wedding present to Lucy was a cookery book; the very bedrock of her sapient philosophy was the art of cookery. I am not sure if she predated Mr Punch's famous advice for How to be Happy though Married—Feed the Brute—but she voiced that Eternal Verity in terms equally exquisite when she pronounced that it is no good having the hearts of husbands without their stomachs are well served—" kissing don't last: cookery do."

Apropos of this great aphorism, Sir William Hardman in after years related an entertaining anecdote concerning Meredith's second wife, which deserves a place in any future compilation of the Curiosities of Coincidence. The Hardmans and Merediths were dining out together at the same house, and in Sir William's words: " The widow of Andrew Crosse, the celebrated electrician, was there, a very lively and talkative lady, who chaffed Meredith immensely about a passage in *Richard Feverel* which had prejudiced her against our friend. . . . It was 'kissing won't last, but cookery will,' as a piece of advice to 'persons about to marry.' On the drive home we discussed it with Mrs Meredith (George riding outside, smoking a cigar), and she said that when she was going to be married, an old aunt wrote her a letter of *dis*couragement and *en*couragement, saying *inter alia* that she had read somewhere, years ago, in a book whose title she had forgotten, that 'kissing won't last, but cookery will.' Was not this singular when she was going to be married to the very man who had written it? "

As already intimated, Adrian Harley, the most

MAURICE FITZGERALD, THE ORIGINAL OF ADRIAN HARLEY IN "RICHARD FEVERAL"

From the pencil portrait, by Samuel Laurence, in the possession of his Son

humorous creation in the book, was drawn to a large extent from Meredith's intimate friend, Maurice FitzGerald. As he was the gourmetic instrument that brought Mrs Ockenden's art to perfect expression, he appropriately attained immortalisation jointly with her at the hands of the friend who had shared with him the joys of that good woman's superlative cookery in Seaford days. One might compile a handbook of wise aphorisms culled from The Wise Youth's entertaining philosophy. His sardonic humour is perhaps at its best in that inimitable scene where he presents portions of Richard's wedding-cake to reluctant relatives, in particular to Uncle Hippias, who terms the stuff poison. In spite of being the "ideal bachelor," Adrian's original, Maurice FitzGerald, whose creed comprised gastronomy, whist, and literature, eventually succumbed to matrimony. In accordance with the eccentricities of his family he married secretly, in 1860, and an entertaining—though probably elaborated—account of the matter will be found in F. C. Burnand's *Records and Reminiscences.*

Maurice FitzGerald seems to figure also in Meredith's remarkable poem, *Phantasy,* 1861, and he takes part in the Bruges nightmare of that terpsichorean divertisement in waltz metre.

Maurice FitzGerald died at the early age of forty-three, in 1878; which suggests that longevity is not always to be attained by philosophy and good cookery, though as a general rule they may aid in warding off the inevitable hour.

The dyspeptic uncle, Hippias, in *Richard Feverel,* is said to have been suggested by R. S. Charnock, the bon-vivant, to whom Meredith had been articled in his legal days.

Meredith described the country of *Richard Feverel* as in a western county by the Thames ; the scenes he had in mind were really south of that reach of the river between Shepperton and Chertsey so familiar to him when living in the former village and at Weybridge. Raynham Abbey can be identified with Woburn Park, near Addlestone, and Farmer Blaize's farm, Belthorpe, with Ham Farm, though the latter place seems to have been considerably changed and modernised since Meredith's description of it as an old red-brick house.

The old lock at Shepperton was the scene of the meeting of Lucy and Richard at the weir, and the neighbouring country, irradiated by sunset, inspired that famous passage of the golden meads and woodlands at sunset. Meredith's powers of scenic description found full development in *Richard Feverel*. The storm on the Rhine is as fine as that in *Farina*.

The late Justin McCarthy, in his article entitled "Novels with a Purpose," which contained one of the ablest reviews of *Richard Feverel*, compared the author's style with that of Carlyle. He said :

"*The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* is a novel of the thoughtful, deep, half-cynical, wholly earnest kind which has so often striven, perhaps not with signal success, to arrest the attention of a public only craving for easy entertainment. It is somewhat in the style of Sterne ; a good deal in the style of one who, acknowledging himself a follower of Sterne, had a warmer heart, a purer soul, and a richer, quainter fancy than the British sentimentalist, I mean Jean Paul Richter. Mr Meredith is often strikingly like Richter in style, with, almost as a matter of necessity, a considerable dash of Carlylese

phraseology. Here and there, indeed, something of unmistakable and pure Carlyle flashes in."

This being so, it is of interest to recall that Meredith's *Richard Feverel* was read and liked by Carlyle, and made the two men acquainted. They were both living in Chelsea, and in his walks Meredith often met Carlyle and longed to speak to him, but had no excuse for doing so. Then, one day, Meredith's publishers received a letter from Carlyle asking about the new author. Meredith seized his opportunity and called at 5 Cheyne Row. Carlyle told him that Mrs Carlyle, on first reading *Richard Feverel*, had disliked the story and flung it upon the floor. But she took it up again, and soon began reading passages aloud to her husband, who said: "The man is no fool." They read the book to the end. Carlyle told Meredith that he possessed the attributes of an historian, and advised him to essay work of that description. But the novelist replied that as so much fiction must always enter into history, he would stick to novel-writing as his method of writing history, which aphorism caused Carlyle to ponder, and not argue in reply, for he realised that there was some truth in the statement. It was a pity this verity could not be offered to the unmeticulous Macaulay.

In later years, apparently, Meredith did not admire his excursion into Carlylean style, for he mentioned, in 1873, that on taking up a copy of *Richard Feverel* and glancing through it he found the lumpy style objectionable. Yet at about the same date he paid a tribute to Carlyle's style in the second chapter of *Beauchamp's Career* in words which very well describe Meredith's own style too.

He offered also a fine tribute to Carlyle in a letter, dated 23rd May, 1882, to M. André Raffalovich.

Probably for the reason that Meredith found the style of the original version of *Richard Feverel* offensive he rewrote the novel to a considerable extent, eliminating and condensing, before the edition of 1878 appeared.[1]

Owing to a review in *The Spectator* accusing it of "low ethical tone," *Richard Feverel* was banned for its "immoral tendency" (!) and subversive doctrines, and Mudie's Library, despite having purchased three hundred copies, refused to circulate the book to subscribers in deference to the fiery cross raised on high by Mrs Grundy.

In 1858 Meredith commenced his memorable and lasting friendship with Captain (subsequently Rear-Admiral) Frederick Augustus Maxse (1833-1900), second son of James Maxse by his marriage with Lady Caroline Fitzhardinge, daughter of the 5th Earl of Berkeley (whose matrimonial affairs formed a *cause célèbre* at the beginning of the nineteenth century). Maxse, when Meredith first met him, was a young naval officer who had recently served with distinction and gallantry in the Crimean War. He also had marked literary tastes, and was a deep thinker, much concerned with social questions. It was, no doubt, to be near this new and congenial friend—subsequently to be the hero of *Beauchamp's*

[1] Meredith made a curious arrangement about this edition. He signed an agreement, dated 3rd November, 1877, with C. Kegan Paul and Co., selling to those publishers the copyright of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* for seven years, by which they agreed to issue the novel in one volume at six shillings, and after the sale of 750 copies net to pay to Meredith a royalty of one shilling and sixpence per copy. These certainly were not wonderful terms for an author then at the height of his powers, who had reached the period of *Beauchamp's Career* and was evolving *The Egoist*.

Career—that Meredith, with his son Arthur, went in 1859 to live in lodgings at Esher. For Maxse's home with his mother, Lady Caroline, was in Surrey ; and a little later he took for his own use a cottage at Molesey, when he and Meredith were constantly together and enjoyed long walks over the heaths and hills of their beloved Surrey. Meredith accompanied his new friend on a trip to Cherbourg in Maxse's cutter-yacht, the *Grebe*, in 1858.

The house (now called Faireholme) where Meredith lodged in Esher is situated on the left-hand side of the main street between " The Bear " Inn and the Post Office. It is a very ancient building, and was formerly a coaching inn known as " The Grapes." The low-ceiled, narrow rooms still preserve the aspect of an old-fashioned tavern. Meredith's sitting-room (where he wrote the commencement of *Evan Harrington*) was that to the right on the first floor, and his bedroom behind it looked on to the pleasant informal garden and Claremont lands beyond. At this period the house was occupied by Mrs Smith, and it is interesting to note that her son-in-law, Mr F. J. Williamson, the distinguished sculptor, was until 1920 still living there, and well remembered the time, sixty years ago, when he and Meredith were under the same roof and constantly meeting. Esher, of course, has other literary associations in addition to Meredith. A few doors from his lodgings is the house where the beautiful sisters, Jane and Anna Maria Porter, had lived with their mother. Their family vault is in the old churchyard. Samuel Warren, the novelist, is buried near the new church ; his son was Rector of Esher. William and Mary Howitt lived at The Cedars, Esher, at one time.

At this date, 1859, Meredith had commenced his activities as a journalist, and his connection with *The Ipswich Journal* ensued the following year; 1860 also marks the date of his securing the post of publisher's reader to Chapman and Hall, which he held for many years: it will be more convenient to deal with these phases of his life in a separate chapter, merely stating now that at this time he was also glad to add to his income by reading aloud to an old lady who, it is to be hoped, appreciated her singular advantage in securing the services of the author of *Richard Feverel*. No doubt she did, for she was a woman of intelligence, Mrs Benjamin Wood, of Eltham Lodge. She was the sister of Sir Evelyn Wood's mother.[1]

At Esher, Meredith unexpectedly met again his friends the Duff Gordons, who had lost sight of him after he left Weybridge for Lower Halliford and Seaford. The resumption of friendship was brought about in a remarkable way. Miss Janet Duff Gordon, now grown to a girl of sixteen, was riding down to Esher station one day when a little boy, some five years old, in trying to run across the road in front of her horse, stumbled and fell. He was

[1] They were the daughters of Sampson Michell, of Croft West, Cornwall. Mrs Benjamin Wood was a good classic scholar, and her translations from Lucian were highly commended. Her many volumes of poetry, prose, and correspondence were privately published: a set is in the possession of her grand-nephew, Sir Thomas Barrett-Lennard, Bart. Mrs Wood's niece, Mrs Steel, relates that Meredith used to visit Eltham Lodge, "as a rule, twice a week; and his gentle chivalry of manner to one many years his senior must have done much to smooth the intercourse of two natures so dissimilar, so independent. She sometimes rebuked him for what seemed to her excess in his opinions and occasionally a fantastic manner of expressing them; but they genuinely liked and respected each other, and he spoke with warmth of her when she could no longer know of his loyalty."

FAIREHOLME, ESHER. HERE MEREDITH LIVED 1858-59, AND COMMENCED "EVAN HARRINGTON"

Contemporary photograph by Mr. F. J. Williamson

much frightened, and the young lady, dismounting, picked him up and strove to reassure him. The boy, who was Arthur Meredith, bravely forced back his tears, gasping out: "Papa says little men ought not to cry." He pointed out the house where he lived, and Miss Duff Gordon, taking the child to the door, was met by a tall, handsome man, who, to her utter amazement, after gazing at her for a moment, and asking: "Are you not Lady Duff Gordon's daughter?" clasped her in his arms, exclaiming: "Oh! my Janet! Don't you know me? I'm your Poet!" And then she remembered her friend of the fairy tales in old days at Weybridge, when she was a little girl. Meredith went that night to dine with the Duff Gordons at Bellvidere House, Esher, near Claremont Park. He was now again constantly with his rediscovered friends, whose house was known as "The Gordon Arms" on account of their ever warm hospitality to troops of friends who visited them there.

Maurice FitzGerald was much with Meredith at Esher, where they lived together in the same house, as in Seaford days; and it was through his introduction of F. C. Burnand, then a young man of twenty-two, that we obtain a delightful picture of Meredith at this period (1859-1860). Sir Francis Burnand thus vividly related, in his *Records and Reminiscences*:

"'Twas in the prime of summer-time,' as the Eugene Aram poem commences, when I paid my first visit to Esher. As we walked across the common, Maurice expatiated on the beauty of the country, of the advantages of rural life over existence in town. . . . 'I thought,' he observed, breaking

off in the midst of a vivid description of the beauties of the Box Hill and Dorking country—'I thought we should have met George.'

"'Who is George?' I asked.

"'George Meredith,' he answered. 'I forgot to tell you that he is stopping with me, or I am with him. It doesn't much matter. We've been together for some time. You know him?' No, I didn't. 'You know,' Maurice put it to me inquiringly, 'his *Shaving of Shagpat* and his poems?'

"I regretted to say that, owing to my studies having been for the last year or more on subjects removed far away from modern literature, I had scarcely looked at any new books for the past eighteen months.

"'Ah!' said Maurice, reflectively. 'You must read his *Richard Feverel*. I've got it and the others at home.'

"Then we saw a figure standing in front of a white gate on our left, about a quarter of a mile distant, waving to us. 'There he is,' said Maurice quietly (he was always quiet); 'we shall meet him where the roads join at the corner.'

"As we neared the 'crossways' (no 'Diana' there as yet), George Meredith was shaking hands with a stoutish, jovial-looking, rubicund-visaged, white-haired gentleman, who, if he had only been attired in gaiters might there and then have been easily taken for the original of Phiz's delineation of the immortal Mr Pickwick.[1]

[1] Mr Pickwick was the pictorial creation of Robert Seymour, who, discarding his first design of a long, thin man, drew the portrait of a short, stout one from the description by Edward Chapman of an actual person, named John Foster, he, the publisher, knew at Richmond. It was the suicide of Seymour in 1836 that gave Phiz his great opportunity, for at the age of twenty-one he was selected to fill the

"George Meredith and this genial elderly gentleman waved their hands encouragingly to one another as the latter disappeared within the gate, and George strode towards us. George Meredith never merely walked, never lounged; he strode, he took giant strides. He had on a soft, shapeless wide-awake, a sad-coloured flannel shirt, with low open collar turned over a brilliant scarlet neckerchief tied in loose sailor's knot; no waistcoat; knickerbockers, grey stockings, and the most serviceable laced boots, which evidently meant business in pedestrianism; crisp, curly, brownish hair, ignorant of parting; a fine brow, quick observant eyes, greyish—if I remember rightly;—beard and moustache, a trifle lighter than the hair. A splendid head; a memorable personality. Then his sense of humour, his cynicism, and his absolutely boyish enjoyment of mere fun, of any pure and simple absurdity. His laugh was something to hear; it was of short duration, but it was a roar; it set you off—nay, he himself, when much tickled, would laugh till he cried (it didn't take long to get to the crying), and then he would struggle with himself, hand to open mouth, to prevent another outburst.

"Two more delightful companions for a young man, trembling on the brink of literature and the drama, it would be difficult to imagine. They were both my hosts. I was at home at once.

"'Who were you talking to as we came up?' asked Maurice. 'That,' said George—'Why you've

vacant post of illustrator to *Pickwick* (then appearing in monthly parts). He very skilfully continued Seymour's conceptions of Pickwick and his three friends, and of Jingle; all the other presentments of the prominent characters of the book were the pictorial creations of Phiz.

met him '—' No,' Maurice didn't remember—' that's Evans, dear old Pater Evans.'

" And it was in this company, in these circumstances, that I first set eyes on Mullet Evans, second partner in the old publishing firm of Bradbury and Evans, then known all over the world as the proprietors of *Punch*. At this time they had among other ventures started *Once a Week* as a rival to Dickens's *All the Year Round*, and George Meredith was writing for this opposition his *Evan Harrington*. George scouted the suggestion that his novel should be called *Bradbury-and-Evans Harrington*.[1]

" Our near neighbours were the Duff Gordons, at whose house George was a *persona grata*. As Maurice did not affect society, and as I was ' a person of no importance,' neither of us, though formally introduced, was included in the invitations sent to George Meredith, then a rising star, by Sir Alexander and Lady Duff Gordon."

Meredith, soon after this first meeting at Esher, introduced Burnand to Bradbury and Evans, the proprietors and publishers of *Punch*, of which he, Burnand, was to become editor some twenty years later. It happened thus. Burnand, ever the best of raconteurs, had told Meredith some amusing stories, merely by way of post-prandial entertainment after the excellent dinners provided by his friends at Esher. Some time after, Burnand discovered these anecdotes retold, under the title of *A Story Telling Party*, in *Once a Week* for December, 1859, with some clever illustrations by Phiz. The

[1] Bradbury and Evans had published much of Dickens's work originally; and Mr Evans's daughter married the novelist's eldest son, Charles Culliford Boz Dickens, in 1861.

contribution was not signed by Meredith. But, to quote Burnand's words, "seeing a point to be scored for myself I wrote to George asking him as a set-off against the 'honorarium' he had received for *my* stories ('only infinitely better told') to recommend a story of mine to the editor. George replied expressing his regret, excusing himself by saying that he never thought I was going to make capital out of them (here he was right), and that he would have great pleasure in submitting my story to the *Once a Week* editor." This he accordingly did, and *Mr Lorquison's Story*, signed F. C. Burnand, and illustrated by Charles Keene, appeared in the issue for 12th May, 1860.

It was curious that *Once a Week*, ably edited as it was by Samuel Lucas and Walford, did not have a more prolonged existence. It was particularly rich on the pictorial side, for the most distinguished artists of the time were contributors; and it thus came about that Meredith's work in the magazine obtained some notable illustrations. His first poem therein, *The Song of Courtesy*, 9th July, 1859, was accompanied by a drawing by John Tenniel, who, consequently, was the first artist to illustrate Meredith. *The Three Maidens*, *Over the Hills*, and *Juggling Jerry*, all dated 1859, were illustrated by Phiz. For the next three poems, 1859-1860, *The Crown of Love*, *The Head of Bran*, and *The Meeting*, the drawings were furnished by J. E. Millais, then just of age. *The Patriot Engineer*, 1861, was illustrated by Charles Keene, and *The Old Chartist*, 1862, by Frederick Sandys, whose remarkable drawing is a fine example of the work of the Pre-Raphaelite school.

It was owing to his connection with *Once a Week*,

and the artists he thereby came in contact with, that Meredith formed his friendship with Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The latter evidently appreciated his society, for in a letter to Alexander Gilchrist, the art critic, in November, 1861, Rossetti said: "Two or three are coming here on Friday evening at eight or so—George Meredith I hope for one. Can you look in? I hope so—nothing but oysters and the seediest of clothes." A memorable picture celebrates this new companionship, for Rossetti when painting *Mary Magdalene at the Gate of Simon the Pharisee* studied the head of Christ from Meredith's face; and this Rossetti portrait is one of the earliest presentments of the poet-novelist in manhood. It was doubtless through Rossetti that Meredith became acquainted with Swinburne, then twenty-three years old, just free from his unfortunate period at Oxford, and already producing one of his first dramas, *The Queen Mother and Rosamond*. As early as October, 1860, Swinburne mentioned in a letter: "I have done some more work to *Chastelard* and rubbed up one or two other things: my friend, George Meredith, has asked me to send some to *Once a Week*, which valuable publication he props up occasionally with fragments of his own." By means of Meredith's interest Swinburne secured acceptance in *Once a Week*, 1862, for his prose story, *Dead Love*, the only one of a series in the Italian style, which he intended to call *The Triameron*, that has been published.

At Esher, Janet Duff Gordon was constantly with Meredith and Arthur (whom she looked after when his father was in London), and on one of their rambles discovered the ideal place for her poet to have his habitation—Copsham Cottage, in the

GEORGE MEREDITH, ABOUT 1860

By D. G. Rossetti

midst of heaths and commons on the way to Oxshott. Hither, in the autumn of 1859, came the Merediths to live in this simple and picturesque little dwelling, old and with low-pitched rooms.[1] Except for the adjacent Copsen Farm, it stood quite alone and low by the roadside, immediately adjoining, without any restricting railings or hedges, the wild and extensive Common. Gorse and heather and mossy mounds; and all around glorious pine and larch woods, and in the heart of them, where their blue misty aisles converged, a romantic little lake, "The Black Pool," fringed by dark trees—here, indeed, was a fitting abode for the poet-novelist.[2] No wonder that amid such lovely surroundings—with Nature and Wild Life at his very door—Meredith was inspired to produce good work. It was at Copsham Cottage that he wrote *Evan Harrington*, *Modern Love*, *Sandra Belloni*, and those *Poems of the English Roadside* so racy of the soil and nomadic life. A few steps from the cottage is a large mound —possibly a place of sepulture in ancient times—whence is commanded a glorious view of hill and dale, and nearer the stately woods of Claremont. This was Meredith's favourite resort. "The Mound"—or "Round Hill" as it is called in the

[1] Copsham Cottage, now called "Copseham," has been greatly enlarged by subsequent owners, and new wings added. But the original rooms occupied by Meredith and his son can still be identified in the present library and two small bedrooms over it. The house is now the home of Mr Herbert Cook, who has much improved the place and its charming garden.

[2] Unfortunately, in 1918, the trees in the Esher woods were ruthlessly cut down for Government and War purposes, and the banks of Black Pool disfigured by timber works. It was unreasonable that a beauty spot so near London should have been selected for procuring timber, when supplies were available nearer lading ports.

maps—is often mentioned in both his correspondence and literary work. In connection with *Sandra Belloni*, writing to Mrs Ross (Janet Duff Gordon) he reminded her of how in old times, when they were sitting one day on the top of The Mound at Copsham, he gave her an account of the real story his novel was based upon. And it was on this Mound, of course, that the party from Brookfield, in the second chapter of the novel, discovered Emilia, the mysterious singer of the woods. The scenery is very accurately depicted. The final scene of the story takes place at the same place. The Mound also figures in the death scene of *Juggling Jerry*,[1] and the adjoining common is mentioned in *The Meeting*.

The influences of surrounding Nature were finely expressed at this period by Meredith in the *Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn*; but more succinctly picturesque is his *Autumn Even-Song*, written during his first autumn at Copsham Cottage in 1859, and which at the close again suggests a personal picture. Merely a matter of individual opinion, I regard this as Meredith's most exquisite poem. What a wealth of observation is here enshrined, and how fine the antithesis of the last line of each verse. This poem is a succession of vividly contrasted pictures. It suggests those wonderful dark-shadowed twilight scenes drawn by Hablot K. Browne at the height of his art, particularly "The Ghost's Walk," in *Bleak House*, where also "pale on the panes of the old hall gleams the lone space between the sunset and the squall."

Copsham Common was a great resort for gipsies, beggars, tinkers, and so forth, and Meredith de-

[1] The illustration, drawn by Phiz, for this poem in *Once a Week*, 1859, gives a fair idea of the spot.

COPSHAM COTTAGE, NEAR ESHER. HERE MEREDITH LIVED 1859-1864, AND WROTE "EVAN HARRINGTON," "SANDRA BELLONI," "MODERN LOVE," AND "POEMS OF THE ENGLISH ROADSIDE"

Contemporary photograph by Mr. F. J. Williamson

lighted to converse with them. As he said, he was an associate with owls and night-jars, tramps and tinkers, who taught him human nature. Much of his work at this period embodies their elemental philosophy; and, needless to say, his first-hand knowledge of nomads was to find its most vivid expression a few years later in *The Adventures of Harry Richmond*. He gave some interesting details of his attitude to poetry at this time, and incidentally of his life at Copsham, to the Rev. Augustus Jessopp, a stranger and an admirer of Meredith's work who had written to express appreciation, and who, in result, was to become one of the author's intimate and trusted friends.[1]

Jessopp had told Meredith that there were three men he particularly wished to see in life: Humboldt, Bunsen and the author of *Richard Feverel*; and that he and his Cambridge friends placed Meredith next to Tennyson as a poet. In his reply Meredith said he had not realised his early ambitions in poetry owing to lack of encouragement on the part of the public and his own disordered health and nerves, which were not conducive to good work. He added that with improving health and more independence he hoped to do better, and that he generally wrote from actual observation. Thus his mendicants were drawn from actual figures met on the highways of Surrey. He concluded by inviting his correspondent to visit him at Copsham, where if the cottage was humble the cooking was good. (His housekeeper, Miss Grange, lived

[1] Dr Jessopp (1824-1914) was at this period headmaster of King Edward VI.'s School, Norwich. He became Rector of Scarning, Norfolk, 1879, and his book, *Trials of a Country Parson*, contains some illuminating studies on the conditions of rural life.

in the cottage many years after Meredith left, in 1864).

Jessopp promptly accepted the invitation, and in December, 1861, paid his first visit to Meredith.

These were the pleasant days of many friendships. At the Duff Gordons' house Meredith met Mrs Norton, Millias, Kinglake, and G. F. Watts. He and Maurice FitzGerald and Burnand also much liked the society of Frederic Chapman, the publisher, who had a cottage in the meadows by the river Mole near Wolsey's Tower and Esher Place. But the most memorable friendships Meredith was about to form, in addition to that with Maxse, were with W. C. Bonaparte Wyse, William Hardman, James Cotter Morison, Lionel Robinson, and John Morley.

William Charles Bonaparte Wyse, born in 1826, was a grand-nephew of Napoleon, being the son of Sir Thomas Wyse, of the Manor of St John, Waterford, by his marriage, in 1821, with Letitia, daughter of Prince Lucien Bonaparte, brother of the Emperor. W. C. Bonaparte Wyse was a poet, particularly versed in Provençal metres. His most famous work, *Parpaioun Blu*, published in 1868, won the enthusiastic approval of Victor Hugo, who wrote: "C'est de la poésie vraie, parfois touchante . . . vous écrivez à merveille, et avec une noble aisance dans ce vivant et lumineux idiome. . . . Nous sommes frères dans la grande fraternité de l'idéal. L'idéal, ciel de l'art, est la patrie des poètes." *Li Piado de la Princesso* was a later collection of Wyse's Provençal poetry.[1] Meredith first met Wyse

[1] A monumental record of Wyse was published by the Librairie Lemerre, Paris, in 1917, under the title of *Un Félibre Irlandais: William Bonaparte-Wyse: sa Correspondance avec Mistral*, par J. Charles-Roux.

WILLIAM CHARLES BONAPARTE WYSE
From a photograph about 1860

in the early part of 1861, and in addition to the bond of poetry, he found Wyse a man after his own heart in that this new friend shared his love for long walks and pleasant excursions in their county of Surrey, for Wyse was living in Guildford, when not at his rooms in Great Coram Street. Consequently, Meredith's letters to him are full of their mutual poetical interests and pedestrian plans, though they soon voice one of the most intimate notes that was ever sounded in his correspondence.

The first letter merely gives directions for reaching Copsham Cottage. In the second he becomes characteristic, and launches forth into directions for meetings at Ripley and The Lone Hut at Wisley by Boldermere. He is weary of working at *Emilia*, and expatiates on the joys of Burford Bridge and the nightingale-haunted Vale of Mickleham, and expeditions afoot as far afield as Guildford and St Martha's Chapel, near Shere. Sometimes Wyse was able to come, and when he was unable to or failed to turn up, Meredith addressed him with lines of reproachful doggerel verse.

So ended this pleasant spring of 1861, with jaunts and nights out—particularly in the Vale of Mickleham, for which Meredith had a lifelong love ; here he was to find his romance, and near by he was to spend the last forty years of his life.

When the spring of 1862 came round, Meredith had found a new fellow-pedestrian in the person of William Hardman. Born in Lancashire, Hardman had studied for the Bar, and, subsequently, he acted as chairman of Surrey Quarter Sessions from 1865 until his death in 1890. He was also editor of *The Morning Post* from 1872, and was knighted in 1885. He was a cheerful, humorous man, with wide literary

knowledge, and married to a lady of gifted personality and musical talent. Meredith first met the Hardmans in 1861, when they were staying at Littleworth Cottage, Esher.[1]

Fortunately Sir William Hardman preserved his reminiscences of Meredith on paper, and they aid considerably in presenting a picture of the novelist at this period. Hardman thus notes the commencement of his friendship with Meredith, which ripened rapidly owing to their mutual tastes, particularly the love of long walks in Surrey :

"During our stay in Esher we have made the acquaintance of George Meredith, the author of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, *Evan Harrington*, etc. He is very clever, original, and amusing. We soon became great allies. He is a widower of thirty-two,[2] with a boy of eight years—one of the finest lads I ever saw . . . his 'little man,' as he calls him. He is immensely proud of this boy, and the boy is well worthy of his father's pride and affection. . . . Contrary to the usual habit of authors, he is not a silent man, and when he is present conversation goes glibly enough. Although only a new chum, he is quite like an old one. . . .

"Meredith chaffs me, and says I resemble in many ways the man (Cobbett) whose biography I have undertaken. The reason of his opinion is, that I come down in the midst of his many poetical rhapsodies with frequent morsels of hard commonsense. I interrupt him with a stolid request to define his terms. I point out discrepancies between

[1] They were introduced by Robert Cooke, of Balham. Mrs Hardman was the daughter of James Radley, of Liverpool.

[2] Meredith was thirty-three at this date.

Sir William Hardman, the original of Blackburn Tuckham in "Beauchamp's Career"

From a photograph of 1863

his most recent sentence and some previous one. The consequence of this is that we get into long arguments, and it was only last Sunday, during one of our country rambles, that, in spite of the raw, inclement January day,[1] we stopped a long time at a stile, seated on the top of which he lectured me, quite ineffectually, on his views of the future destinies of the human race."

And now follow some delightful glimpses of life at Copsham Cottage and rambles in Surrey during the autumn of 1861 and the spring of 1862 :

"We have just returned from a charming little country run of two days and one night. Yesterday morning we left the Waterloo Station at 9.15 for Esher. All our mutual requirements were condensed into a little black bag, which I carried, and we started from the station at Esher triumphantly, regardless of vehicles, for a walk of two and a half miles to Copsham Cottage. We were going to stay all night with our good friend George Meredith. The heartiest of welcomes awaited us at the really humble cottage—for it makes no pretensions to anything, but performs a vast deal more than many great houses that promise so much. Meredith is a man who abhors ceremony, and the 'conventionalities.' After our first greetings were over, we turned out for an hour and a half before lunch. We had exhausted all our superlatives in extolling the day and the walk between the station and the cottage, but we had to begin again now. The scent of the pine-woods, the autumn tints on the elms and beeches, the brilliant sunlight exalted us to

[1] 1862.

a climax of ecstasy. We were children again. Luncheon on our return consisted chiefly of home-made products—bread, honey, jams, marmalade, etc., most delicious. Then came a general lighting of pipes and cigars, and off we started for another walk through lanes and wood to Cobham, a good six-mile business. We got back at five o'clock and dined at six. What appetites we had! Gracious goodness! Meredith's two other guests [1] left at eight, to walk home to Walton-on-Thames, and then we put a log of wood on the fire and sat down for a cosy talk. Meredith read some poems which are to form part of a volume shortly to be published. So passed the time till 10.30, when to bed we went, thoroughly prepared to sleep soundly, as you may easily imagine. Up at seven, and away went Meredith and myself for a brisk walk of three or four miles, after taking a tea-cup of hot soup and a slice of bread. After breakfast Meredith retired to work at his book of poems, while we went to call on some friends in the neighbourhood. On our return he read to me the result of his morning's work—portion of a very pretty idyll called *Grandfather Bridgeman.*[2] . . . We left Esher by the four o'clock train, carrying with us a pot of honey for consumption in Gordon Street. Hadn't we enjoyed ourselves!"

"On Friday, May 23rd (1862), after dining together at his cottage at Copsham, Meredith and I started about seven o'clock in the evening, intending, if we failed to obtain beds at Mickleham,

[1] Cotter Morison and James Virtue, his brother-in-law.

[2] This poem duly appeared in Meredith's second volume of verse, *Modern Love and Poems of the English Roadside, with Poems and Ballads*, published by Chapman and Hall in May, 1862.

to walk on to Burford Bridge.[1] I had no bag or pack of any kind, carrying all my necessaries in the capacious pockets of a shooting jacket. Meredith had what the Germans call, I believe, a 'rucksack,' a sort of bag slung by a strap over the back and hanging under the left arm—a most convenient article. In it he carried, besides toilet necessaries, a *Murray's Handbook to Surrey*, and some capital brandy.

"I may as well mention here that we never addressed each other by our real names. He called me 'Tuck,' and I called him 'Robin.' Having enjoyed a good dinner before starting, we walked at a pace befitting the victuals, steady and sober, enlivening the way with snatches of song, reminiscences of overtures, frequent bursts of laughter, and absurd rhymes, as occasion suggested. The evening looked dubious and stormy, and the sunset was red and lowering, but on we went, nevertheless. We avoided Leatherhead by a cut across the fields, coming into the main road by the church. It was quite dark when we reached Mickleham, about twenty minutes past nine. The landlady of the inn was most obliging, and promised us the accommodation we required. After making arrangements, we strolled out to listen to the nightingales in the meadows on the banks of the Mole. While enjoying the cool air, drinking in their music, mingled with the croaking of frogs, 'the monotonous clattering of the brown eve-jar,' and all the varied sounds of a summer night, Meredith recited Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale*, one of Robin's favourite poems. We returned to our inn singing my music to Robin's

[1] Meredith had made the same pilgrimage in honour of spring the previous year, 1861. See *ante*, p. 115.

madrigal addressed to myself, *Since Tuck is faithless found*, amid peals of laughter. After large potations of soda-water, flavoured with the brandy aforesaid, we retired to rest about eleven o'clock. Our bedrooms communicated by a passage, being shut out from the rest of the house, and we lay shouting to each other, and joking about the joviality of the whole affair, neither of us getting to sleep for an hour or so.[1] My window was wide open, and I could hear the nightingales singing in the trees by the meadows. About three o'clock I was awoke by a pertinacious sparrow who had his home under the eaves close by my window; this was followed by the ringing of the stable-yard bell by some very late or early traveller, with no apparent result to himself. I could hear the stamp of his horse's feet in the distance, but the bell was close under my window. After a troubled doze, a busy cock took up the wondrous tale, and after a few loud crows, commenced a very noisy commentary on the egg-laying work of one or more of his wives; this sound resembled a much magnified and more andante sort of night-jar. I have omitted the mention of an earnest dispute between certain village tipplers in the bar, on the merits or demerits, sayings and doings of one 'Charlie Andrews,' all of which was audible to me and assisted in keeping me awake when first I went to bed. At last the sparrow wandered away to seek for food, the eggs were laid, and I had a snooze in peace, when, about 5.30 A.M., Meredith enters my room with a suggestion that we should get up. I recommended him to go to

[1] It was at the old "Running Horse" Inn that Meredith and Hardman stayed. The place is quite unchanged. In earlier days the stage coaches stopped here.

bed again, and he did so. We eventually got up about seven, and strolled out to see the immediate neighbourhood while breakfast was being got ready.

"The church is nearly opposite the inn, and into the churchyard we went. A pet lamb came to us, expecting, as Robin put it, a gratuity of some kind, but got nothing, as we had nothing to give it. Beyond the churchyard, which is very lovely, a stile-road leads across some meadows up the Mickleham Downs. Meredith declares that here may be obtained one of the most perfect bits of rustic scenery in this country, and consequently in any other. The church spire is seen embedded in rich foliage, backed by the hills crowned by Norbury Hall, with all the noble trees placed there by dear old Evelyn of the *Diary*. The most critical artist—and Meredith has an artist's appreciation of landscape—need not modify one iota of the view; every tree in its place, and the spire of the church just where it should be. Higher up the scene broadens, and with all the varied greens of May made another view of great beauty. In the midst of our enthusiasm the church clock chimed eight, and warned us of our waiting breakfast.

"After breakfast I wrote a short note to my wife ('Demitroïa' as we call her),[1] for which I was duly chaffed by Meredith, who called me an 'uxorious old Tuck,' and finally wrote a note to her himself to tell her that I never thought of writing till I had eaten I know not how many chops, kidneys, eggs, and the etceteras. I posted the letter at nine, and on we went for our day's walk. Striking into the meadows by the Mole we crossed the bridge near

[1] Meredith gave the name to Mrs Hardman because her husband had taken five years to win her—half the period of the Siege of Troy.

the 'Swallows,' and so back into the road near Burford Bridge, revelling in the glory of the morning and the lovely scenery. We followed the high-road to Dorking for some distance, and then struck into a by-path across the fields into the town. After making vain efforts to obtain a *Saturday Review* or any other 'weekly,' we went on towards Guildford, soon emerging on a heath rich with nutty smells of gorse all ablaze, on the right of which was a tumulus. Presently a sudden descent brought us to 'The Rookery,' the birthplace of Malthus, a quaint old house embedded deep in foliage. Soon after this we lost our way, but Meredith made inquiry of certain tillers of the field, and by dint of scrambling over hedge and ditch we at length found ourselves on the right road. Our mishap occurred in consequence of the interest taken by Robin in Malthus's birthplace. In order to get a better view of the house we had turned into a lane, which passed close to 'The Rookery.' Emerging from dense thicket of underwood, we found ourselves on a carriage road which led past Wotton House. Coming to the little village of Shere, we turned into the inn for a rest, and some ale and bread and cheese.

"Soon after leaving Shere we started up a very steep ascent through a deeply embowered lane, terminating in an avenue of beech-trees. From the summit we had glimpses of a magnificent view, St Martha's Chapel being a very prominent object. The ascent of the hill took away all my spare breath to Robin's great amusement. Presently we began an abrupt descent into a place called Combe Bottom, one of the most lovely spots in creation. Combe Bottom is one of those basins hollowed out of the chalk, with almost precipitous sides, covered with

short grass at the base, but crowned with the most luxurious foliage in every variety of tint. On a bare projecting knob we lay down and smoked our pipes while enjoying the surroundings. Here Robin overhauled his note-books and read to me a number of aphorisms hereafter to be published in '*The Pilgrim's Script*, by Sir Austin Feverel, edited by Adrian Harley.' We discussed them at our ease, for such terse sayings naturally provoke conversation. As Sir Austin says, 'A proverb is the halfway house to a thought.' Having finished our aphorisms and our pipes we descended to the bottom and crossed to the opposite side, on to the Merrow Downs, along which we walked as far as Newland's Corner. Immediately below us on our left lay Albury, where, as Meredith reminded me, the author of *Proverbial Philosophy* resides.[1] At Newland's Corner, by crossing twenty yards to the right, we obtained a magnificent view over Ripley towards St George's Hill and the great valley of the Thames. Returning to the path, we descended to the valley and mounted St Martha's Hill to the Chapel at its summit.

"Getting once more on to the main road we made for Guildford, where, on arriving, we ordered a cold dinner and proceeded to the railway station to get copies of *The Saturday Review*, *Public Opinion*, and *The Spectator* (May 24th, 1862). The last-named journal contained an article on Meredith's *Poems* and *Modern Love*, etc., and a regular stinger it was! Robin was naturally annoyed, for the review was most unreasonable, and was, in my opinion, written with decidedly personal feeling. Meredith did not agree with me in this, and eventually concluded

[1] Martin Farquhar Tupper (1810-1889).

that the review was written by a woman. The disagreeable topic did not interfere much with our pleasure, we were too much determined to enjoy ourselves, and Robin's annoyance soon passed off.

"After our cold collation we started again for Godalming, intending to pass through that town and sleep at a place two miles beyond. The evening was very fine, and defying the critic of *The Spectator*, we found the walk most exhilarating. In passing through Godalming we could not help noticing the number of patriarchal dogs lying about on the door-steps. Robin was much tickled by my styling one in particular as an 'ancient dog,' he said it sounded so very old. At a small inn near the village of Milford we found a civil and obliging hostess, who recollected Meredith, he having stayed there the summer before with Maxse. She said she could give us beds, so we ordered tea, and took a stroll to an eminence on the wild common adjoining, from which we obtained a fine but desolate view. It was now nine o'clock, and as we had been on our feet for twelve hours we were not sorry to rest. The house filled with hilarious rustics, who sang old tunes with very dolorous choruses. It was Saturday night. They kept it up till midnight. Our bed-rooms were very plain, for the house was a small and poor one, but they were clean, and the beds well aired. The following morning (Sunday) we were both up by seven o'clock, took a stroll in the garden, and awaited our coffee, chops, and unlimited bread and butter. Our hostess was very reasonable in her bill, only 3s 6d. each. We gave sixpence to the little maid who waited upon us, and she was greatly pleased.

"Our course now lay by Thursley over heath,

and through hedges white with hawthorn bloom, most beauteous to behold. The sun streamed hotly down upon us. . . . In due time we reached the Devil's Punch Bowl, and ascended to the summit of Hindhead. We lay down and smoked several pipes, enjoying a prospect of from 15 to 30 miles in every direction. We thought we could distinguish the sea through a distant break in the South Downs. At our feet lay Haslemere, and the Black Down, in the distance was Baker Hill, and the high ground about Ashford, and Selborne. We could see the Hog's Back, St Martha's Chapel, and the ridge of downs stretching to Box Hill and Reigate. It was most glorious.

"About noon we started down towards Haslemere, so as to get there by one o'clock, when folks would be out of church and inns open. We knocked at the hostel of the White Horse about ten minutes to one, and had a cut at the family dinner, a breast of veal, washed down by copious draughts of the best pale ale Meredith and I had ever tasted. After dinner we sat on a wall in the garden and smoked. About three we started—ignominiously, as Robin would have it—in a four-wheel chaise for Godalming to catch the train at 5.15, there being no train from Haslemere before 7.20. I arrived in town about seven o'clock having dropped Meredith at Esher."

I have quoted Hardman's account at length, because his simple, if detailed, language presents an admirable picture of Meredith in these pleasant days when the two friends, still young and compact of health and strength, rambled over Surrey, enjoying the lovely scenery, the good plain fare of homely inns, and many a jest and hearty laugh.

Such things go to make the best of life. And this was one of the happiest periods of Meredith's life, and his friendship with Hardman was one of its jolliest features. He regarded "Tuck" with a sort of Shaksperean humour, and the letters to Hardman, the most delightful he ever wrote, are redolent of the mutual pleasures they both so heartily and healthfully enjoyed. Ofttimes he broke into verse, as for example in the delightful madrigal which mentions Copsham Mound, *Since Tuck is faithless found.*[1]

As with those to Wyse, similarly Meredith's early letters to Hardman are redolent of high spirits and full of proposals for walking jaunts, a favourite destination being the old Talbot Inn at Ripley, particularly in the merry month of May—and asparagus. Meredith would work hard at *Emilia*, and then be off to the green meadows and gorse-golden heaths of his lovely county.

Meredith introduced Hardman to Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Hardman records:

"Yesterday I went with George Meredith to see Rossetti, the celebrated Pre-Raphaelite painter. He had, unfortunately, no finished works in his studio, but his collection of sketches was most interesting and beautiful. He is a very jolly fellow, and we had a most amusing visit. I am going on

[1] Hardman notes: "This was written in consequence of having been obliged to postpone a promised visit to Copsham Cottage. (Mem. 'The Mound,' line 6, is a conspicuous eminence hard by the cottage.) I told him I would immortalise the words by setting them to music, but he begged me not to as he would rather write me something fit to read. No, I would not be persuaded, and I have yesterday composed the music in madrigal style for three voices." See *ante*, p. 120.

Friday to his place again, to a social reunion of artists and literary men, short pipes and beer being, I am given to understand, the order of the day."

Hardman gave Rossetti a far more ambitious entertainment in return. He writes in April, 1862 :

"I had a very select dinner party at the Club last night. Meredith, Dante Rossetti, and Dr Liveing were my party, and I flatter myself they never sat down to a better selected meal in their lives. They were enthusiastic, and I have added fresh laurels to my fame as a dinner-giver. An enviable notoriety, but expensive. We kept it up till 12-30, and Meredith (whom I with difficulty piloted through the Haymarket, he was so very rampant) came home and stayed all night with me."

The menu of this most excellent dinner, and the wines, was quoted by Hardman in full. He mentioned, too, that Meredith at this date had taken to felling trees and sawing up logs at Copsham, to promote circulation and improve his digestion.

It was Hardman who first introduced Lionel Robinson—familiarly known as "Poco"—to Meredith about 1861.

Lord Morley of Blackburn informed me that he first knew Meredith in the early sixties and that he frequently visited his friend at Copsham. This is doubtless the period alluded to by the late W. T. Stead in his character sketch of the then John Morley [1] :

[1] *The Review of Reviews*, November, 1890.

"No living person would hold a higher place in the list of those who had contributed to fashion his mind than Mr George Meredith. In the early days, before he became famous, Mr George Meredith, then himself neither so popular nor so widely known as he is to-day, took him with a friendly hand. He used to stay with Mr Meredith in a remote country village, and in the evening Mr Meredith would read over the work he had done in the day—the chapter or the poem. It was Mr Meredith who awoke in him the feeling for nature which has ever since remained as one of the great pleasures of his existence, as well as imparting to him a larger concern for the wisdom of life. For many years the long walks across the Surrey Commons, where the south-west wind blows, and when Mr Meredith's genius was at its best, were the delight of Mr Morley's life. 'Much, and very much,' Mr Morley once told me, did he owe to the wise and stimulating friendship of George Meredith in the impressionable times." [1]

Morley, at this date, was in his early twenties, and had not long left Oxford. James Cotter Morison had been at Lincoln College with him, and the two intimate friends often went to Copsham together. Morison (1832-1888), as the author of *The Life and Times of St Bernard*, was soon dubbed "St Bernard" by Meredith, and it is by that name that he is generally alluded to in subsequent correspondence.

But of all the notable friends who came to visit Meredith amid the woods of Copsham one likes most to picture the youthful Swinburne with his aureole

[1] Lord Morley has also stated that Meredith "lived at every hour of day and night with all the sounds and shades of Nature open to his sensitive perception."

of flaming hair, his inspired ecstasies of poetical expression, and his marvellous flow of language which Meredith described as a torrent of boiling lava. On one famous occasion at Copsham in June, 1862, Swinburne read aloud his recent discovery—the *Omar Khayyám* of Edward FitzGerald. This had been first published in 1859, but the work met with neglect, and FitzGerald, in disgust, disposed of the two hundred copies he had to Quaritch, telling him to do what he liked with them. The bookseller threw them into the "Twopenny Box"—though fifty years later a single copy could reach the price of £51. But in the early days the little volume came to the notice of Swinburne, firing his enthusiasm and inspiring him to great creation in the same stately metre as *Omar*.

He was impatient to reveal his find to Meredith. As he came near to Copsham Cottage, along the road from Esher, he was seen to be brandishing a white pamphlet in the manner of a fanatical preacher, and soon he was heard declaiming the stately stanzas of his rich treasure. He and Meredith and some other friends sat on The Mound for hours reciting *Omar Khayyám*; the dinner-bell went unheeded at first; then, the meal over, the party returned to The Mound and recited again the verses until nightfall. Suddenly Swinburne ran into the cottage, returned with paper, quill pen, and red ink. In an hour he had written the first thirteen stanzas of *Laus Veneris*, directly inspired by *Omar Khayyám*.

A month before his death, and in one of the last letters [1] he ever wrote, Meredith gave a description of this scene; the memories of Copsham days were with him to the last.

[1] To *The Times*, 15th April, 1909.

So The Mound by Copsham Cottage can claim to be the spot where Swinburne composed *Laus Veneris* on that long evening of a far-away June when, after the sun had set beyond the woods of Claremont, "Night falls like fire; the heavy lights run low." Surely if ever mortal scenes are revisited by the shades of those who met there in the happy past, in the days of vigorous life and youth and bright mental power, it is a famous company that passes silently along the misty vistas of Copsham woods and lingers regretfully by The Mound and The Black Pool in the wan light of a waning moon.

THE MOUND BY COPSHAM COTTAGE
Photograph by Mr. F. J. Williamson

CHAPTER VI

"EVAN HARRINGTON." ARTHUR MEREDITH AND HIS FATHER: THEIR TOUR ABROAD. "MODERN LOVE." MEREDITH AT CHELSEA: HIS RELATIONS WITH ROSSETTI AND SWINBURNE

EVAN HARRINGTON, or *He would be a Gentleman*, appeared serially in *Once a Week* from February to October, 1860. A pirated version of the story was brought out in America at the end of the same year. Meredith had contemplated an American edition twelve months earlier, but the idea was not carried out.

The three-volume edition of *Evan Harrington* was issued in London by Bradbury and Evans in 1861, and it has now some considerable value, for the author's presentation copy to his friend, W. C. Bonaparte Wyse, realised as much as £29 not long ago.

In *Once a Week* the story was illustrated by Charles Keene, whose drawings are of singularly unequal merit. Some are admirable, particularly *The Death of the Great Mel.* and *Tom Cogglesby's Arrival at Beckley Court*: others could hardly be worse than they are. Those portraying the Countess de Saldar and Mrs Strike convey no impression of the beauty and charm of the ladies, on which such stress is laid in the novel, and poor Rose Jocelyn is represented always as positively ugly by the artist: it is, indeed, amazing that Meredith could ever have passed the drawings of

Evan and Rose, *On Board the "Jocasta"* and *In the Conservatory*, except as caricatures of his creations.

The story, like the illustrations, is also of unequal merit: parts are superb, but others are very poor, and *longueurs* are not unknown. Though superlatively entertaining, the story as a story is absurd and impossible, for no children of tailordom could have kept up the farce of denying their origin, even when they were known to be what they were, in the manner of the Harringtons at Beckley Court; consequently the Countess's plots and brilliant generalship become supererogatory. Evan's quixotic sacrifice in the matter of taking on himself the onus of his sister's anonymous letter, and his frequent wilful misunderstandings and renunciations of Rose are extremely improbable, and provoke as much exasperation as the follies of Richard Feverel.

Again the influence of Dickens is apparent in some exaggeration of character in this book. Jack Raikes is a fantastic, impossible creature obviously inspired by Jingle and Simon Tappertit, and only the Master of Caricature Character could have rendered him tolerable; Lawyer Perkins suggests Perker the lawyer in *Pickwick*; and the Cogglesby Brothers are nearly allied to the Cheeryble Brothers, Martin Chuzzlewit, Mr Jarndyce, and many other old gentlemen of conspiratorial benevolence to be found with beetling brows but twinkling eyes in the great Boz Gallery. Evan Harrington himself is stilted, unsympathetic, and remote from real life; whilst Laxley, Harry Jocelyn, and George Uploft are so remarkable for ill-breeding and insolence that one can only suppose Meredith desirous of paying off

old grudges against some local Hampshire bloods who may have slighted him in his sensitive youth. It is only when we get to the feminine characters of the story that the sun of Meredith's art rises in full splendour to dazzle the imagination with snbtlety and wit and portraiture *in excelsis*. The Countess de Saldar, Mrs Strike, Mrs Mel., Lady Jocelyn, Juliana Bonner, and Rose—these are no puppets, they live, each a distinctive personality and vivid creation.

Very realistic and never to be forgotten are the great scenes of this book. Evan's adventure with the postillion on the way home to Portsmouth—how plainly we see the youth, humiliated yet proud, striding along the white road across the Downs in the moonlight, the chariot dragging some paces behind him ; the funereal events at the shop ; the race on horseback for Rose's handkerchief and the resulting accident ; the dinner party at Beckley Court, when the digesting of the Great Mel. proved too much for Mrs Strike ; the love scene by the little stream in Beckley Park ; Mrs Mel.'s dramatic arrival at the picnic ; the scene, of tremendous power, where Evan wrests from the Countess the fact that she wrote the anonymous letter, and in humorous contrast that one where the outwitted Andrew Cogglesby dines on bankrupt fare and domestic ice ; and, finally, Evan's renunciation of Rose by the Park Gates, amid the glamour of a May night in sharp contrast to lovers' pain. *Evan Harrington* would make a fine play, and it is curious that it has never been dramatised. Meredith is said to have discouraged the proposal by asking : " To what English actress would you entrust the part of the Countess de Saldar ? " To which one might reply

in these days: "Miss Irene Vanbrugh, or Mrs Patrick Campbell."

There are some very apt aphorisms in the book, such as that relating to the great British hunger for papers and news—second only to that for beef, and equally acceptable salted, when it cannot be had fresh—and much that reflects acute observation of life and manners. But the work betrays ignorance of the peculiar and arbitrary laws which govern the expression of English titles. For instance, reference is made to a Knight Companion of the Bath; the daughter of the Earl of Elburne is called "the Hon. Miss Jocelyn"; and the Duke of Belfield is addressed as "My Lord."

As I have already described in my first chapter, *Evan Harrington* is very intimately connected with the family history of the author, who took his own father for the hero of the story; introduced the characteristics, and personal history, to a certain extent, of three of his aunts; and painted a very accurate picture of his grandparents, Mr and Mrs Melchizedek Meredith and their tailor's shop at 73 High Street, Portsmouth. With this subject I have dealt fully, but there remain one or two points connected with my grandparents, the originals of Major and Mrs Strike, that need, in justice to their reputations, to be put right. For here, it has to be admitted, Meredith was actuated by a petty and long-brooded personal animus against his relatives. It is no easy task to explain briefly how much fact and how much fiction go to make up the presentment of the Strikes, for their creator had the subtlety of the serpent in blending verities with falsehoods. He paid full tribute to the beauty of my grandmother and her gentle, clinging disposition (Evan

Catherine Matilda Meredith (Mrs. S. B. Ellis). The original of Mrs. Strike in "Evan Harrington"

loved this beautiful creature the best of his three sisters); and it is interesting proof of Meredith's meticulous detail that he remembered and mentioned his aunt's one physical defect—rather too prominent cheek-bones—in the scene where the Countess begs her sister to dress her hair plain in order that George Uploft should not recognise her. The habitual curls and the high cheek-bones of Mrs Strike will be seen in the portrait of Mrs Ellis reproduced in this work. Meredith also admits the personal bravery of my grandfather, but after the statement that the Officer of Marines married his wife when he was stationed at Portsmouth, we come mainly to the realm of fiction. Most certainly this one of the Daughters of the Shears was not an escaped Eurydice who never reappeared in the gloomy realms of Dis, otherwise Trade. The early years of Mrs Ellis's married life were spent near her old home in the High Street, first at 1 Algier Place, Alverstoke, and later in Great Southsea Street, three of her children being born during this period. The behaviour of Major Strike to his wife in the story is entirely fiction. The Ellis marriage was a moderately happy one (as numerous letters, journals, and other evidences attest), though there was but little money; a large family was brought up on a Major's pay. It may be superfluous to add that Mrs Ellis did not contemplate an elopement with a duke, and did not become a widow. She died at Chatham, in 1847, at the age of fifty-two, four days after her son Samuel, who was only twenty-two. It is strange that her simple, well-spent life, devoted to the care and interests of her children, should have been so distorted by her nephew, to whom she had shown many kindnesses in his boyhood. Both she and her

husband, a particularly distinguished soldier, did their duty, and had many troubles and sorrows. Fortunately my grandmother died long before the publication of *Evan Harrington*; my grandfather was still living in 1861, but I do not know if he read the book.

It may pertinently be asked in what way had Sir S. B. Ellis offended George Meredith that he should be the victim of such a bitter attack here, and also in *The Egoist*. I have no definite information, but only a suggestion to offer. My grandfather was induced by some speculators to allow his name to appear as a director of a company formed to run "The Direct Exeter and Plymouth Railway." The scheme became a failure in 1852, and involved the loss of all Sir S. B. Ellis's savings, and also of a large portion of his income, which had to be allocated for many years to meet the claims made upon him in connection with the liabilities of the company. My theory is that the General may have advised George Meredith to invest his small maternal inheritance—or some portion of it—in this unfortunate enterprise, and that the loss of the money brought down upon the uncle his nephew's implacable resentment. Meredith stated his trustee "had by fraud or folly squandered the little estate"; and it will be recalled that in *Evan Harrington* there is frequent reference to a speculating company in which Major Strike was interested, and that the Duke of Belfield resigned from the Board owing to the unsatisfactory condition of affairs. But, as I have said, this is merely a suggestion, and may be quite unrelated to the causes which engendered the undoubted dislike that George Meredith entertained for his relative.

The author's father, Augustus Meredith, was also living when *Evan Harrington* was published, and he read the story of which he was the hero ; though, of course, most of the incidents of the tale were fictitious and the character of Evan mainly evolved by the creative art of George Meredith, who merely utilised the situation of his father at the time of the Great Mel.'s death, whilst fully emphasising Augustus Meredith's dislike for a trade career and his aspirations for higher stratas of society.

As already related, Augustus Meredith emigrated to South Africa in 1849, and for many years he carried on his business as tailor in Cape Town, his shop being situated in St George's Street, at the corner of Hout Street. His sister's son, George Ellis, R.N., the original of Crossjay Patterne in *The Egoist*, was also in Cape Town at this period, and he married there in 1851. Probably it was owing to the advice of this nephew that Augustus came to try his luck in that quarter of the globe, then so remote.

After the death of George Meredith in 1909, some correspondence was published in *The Cape Times* on the subject of local reminiscences of the novelist's father. A great many erroneous statements were made, but some points of interest relative to *Evan Harrington* transpired. Mr B. T. Lawton, of Rondebosch, who had been a customer and friend of Augustus Meredith, wrote that he well remembered how, in 1860, when *Evan Harrington* was appearing serially in *Once a Week*, he one day entered the shop and found the tailor in very low spirits. As a rule Augustus was very uncommunicative, but on this occasion, with an obvious desire for sympathy, he departed from his usual reserve and asked Mr

Lawton if he had seen the new story. "I am very sore about it," said Augustus; "I am pained beyond expression, as I consider it aimed at myself, and I am sorry to say the writer is my own son." Mr Lawton added that Augustus Meredith was then a handsome man of medium stature, well educated, and exceedingly obliging in business. He told Mr Lawton that in England he walked many miles every day, and this led to Augustus, at the ripe age of the mid-sixties, accompanying his Cape Town friend in an ascent of Table Mountain. Several other correspondents contributed their recollections, one stating that Augustus Meredith lent him a copy of *Farina*, and another relating how the Rev. Dr James Cannon once said to the tailor: "I am much interested in the career of your distinguished son," whereupon the father turned hastily away and made no reply.

On the whole it appears that Augustus Meredith did not like allusions to his son. He eventually returned to England about 1863, and settled near his old home in Portsmouth. He lived first at Argyll Villas, Wish Street, Southsea, and later at 50 Elm Grove (then called 2 Oxford Villas), a house which belonged to his second wife and where he spent the remainder of his years. Occasionally George Meredith came down for a few hours to see his father, merely a duty, for affection there was none. There is only one allusion to Augustus in his son's letters. In October, 1870, writing to his own son Arthur, then a boy of seventeen, at school on the Continent, George Meredith told him he had seen Grandpapa Meredith on his way to Captain Maxse's.

Augustus Meredith died on 18th June, 1876, at the age of seventy-nine, and was buried (in the same vault as his second wife, Matilda Buckett, who died

in 1885, at the age of sixty-seven) at Highland Road Cemetery, Southsea. George Meredith was present at his father's funeral. He inherited a few personal effects and family portraits : but these pictures were never seen prominently in his house. To the last, with that strange secretive sensitiveness which made his early days a closed book of mystery, he put out of sight and mind all memories and reminders of his youth in Portsmouth. And yet, in strange contradiction, he had recorded his family history in *Evan Harrington*. As I previously advanced, it could not be actual shame of the shop that prompted his reticence in conversation concerning his origin. Probably *Evan Harrington* was a sort of safety valve whereby he gave vent to much long-repressed emotion—old slights, old humiliations, bitter regrets that he, so aristocratic in aspiration and personal appearance, was basely born, as he hyperbolically expressed it in the person of Evan. Undoubtedly there are many passages in the book voicing the personal bitterness of Meredith at the circumstances of his birth and youth. There is also a passage in chapter x. of *The House on the Beach* (written, as we have seen, in 1861, soon after *Evan Harrington*) which, I think, accurately expresses Meredith's attitude, as a Son of the Shop, to Trade.

And now, at last, we are able to depart finally from the shop and Portsmouth, and, following in the track of the Harringtons, arrive at Petersfield (" Fallowfield "), where it would seem the daughters of Melchizedek Meredith had gone to school. Possibly Dubbins's Seminary for Young Ladies was located in that ancient building, formerly " The Castle " Inn, where stayed Charles II. and Pepys. " The Green Dragon " Inn was probably intended

for "The Anchor," and "The Dolphin" was described under its own name—the scene where "Mrs Mel. makes a Bed." Beckley Court was, I think, intended for Fair Oak Lodge, about fifteen miles, as mentioned in the book, from Petersfield. The place tallies with Beckley, and the river Rother runs through the grounds, as in Meredith's beautiful description of the rising harvest moon. Fair Oak Lodge was occupied by G. P. R. James, the novelist, in 1837-1839.

It is well known that the characteristics of Sir Franks and Lady Jocelyn and Rose were drawn from the author's friends, Sir Alexander and Lady Duff Gordon and their daughter Janet, of whom Meredith saw so much at the time he was writing *Evan Harrington*. Particularly successful was he in delineating the rich personality of Lady Duff Gordon. She (daughter of John Austin, Professor of Jurisprudence, and through her mother a descendant of the Taylors of Norwich) was a very remarkable woman and of a distinguished type of beauty. In advance of her time, she possessed a singular masculinity of intellect, was a famous traveller, and a writer of ability and charm, and smoked cigars both indoors and out. She died in 1869 at the early age of forty-eight. It attaches worthily to her name that she was one of the first to perceive Meredith's powers in his early days as a writer. He received many kindnesses from her, and she was one of the few who understood with sympathy and tact his shy, sensitive nature. He was not ungrateful. "O what a gallant soul she is, and how very much I love her!" he said in 1861; and he paid a fine tribute to her in the after years in the Introduction he wrote for Lady Duff Gordon's

LUCIE, LADY DUFF GORDON, THE ORIGINAL OF LADY JOCELYN IN "EVAN HARRINGTON," AND OF LADY DUNSTANE IN "DIANA OF THE CROSSWAYS"

From the portrait by H. W. Phillips

Letters from Egypt. How well his estimate blends with the picture of Lady Jocelyn and recalls her sane, serene attitude to life: both possessed *cœurs d'or.* It is a pleasant memorial of the old days at Esher. The amusing Miss Current, in *Evan Harrington,* was drawn from Miss Louisa Courtenay, an old friend of Lady Duff Gordon, who often came to Esher. And Pat, the Irish retriever pup, had his original in Peter, the property of Miss Janet Duff Gordon, at whose special request the dog was introduced into the story. Peter, after being broken in, was given to Arthur Meredith. Miss Duff Gordon seems quite to have entered into the spirit of her progressive immortalisation as Rose Jocelyn, for she relates she would often interrupt Meredith's reading of his latest instalment of "her" story with the remark: "No, I should never have said it like that." And as she expressed it to me: "I 'corrected' myself in *Evan Harrington.*" But Meredith thought otherwise, for he held the model to be the finer part.

Certainly the history of this novel is a curious one, for here was the author drawing from the life the characteristics of his friends with their willing consent, though at the same time those friends were quite unaware that other characters in the book were drawn from the author's own relatives, long since dead or lost sight of, and that the story was the unveiling of part of his own inner sensitiveness.

Needless to say that, like that brave high young soul Rose, Miss Duff Gordon was a fearless rider, and relations of her adventures on horseback will be found in Mrs Ross's book of reminiscences, *The Fourth Generation.* When she married and left Esher, owing to Mrs Ross's permanent residence

abroad she did not often meet her old friend again. Forty-three years later she saw him, five years before his death, for the last time. He was aged and deaf, "but the old fire and brilliancy were there, and we talked for two or three hours about old times and old friends, most of them, alas, dead. 'You have something of Rose in you still, my dear,' he said, smiling rather sadly as I got up to go; 'those were pleasant days.'" And Mrs Ross concludes: "What an uphill fight he had, and how splendidly he won it. I never think of him as the old man I saw at Box Hill. He lives in my memory as the lithe, active companion who so often strode along by the side of my cob over Copsham Common, brandishing his stick and talking so brilliantly."

I have already alluded to the love and devotion Meredith showered upon his little son Arthur in the years immediately following the separation from the wife and mother and the death of that most unhappy of women. This supreme affection of the then lonely father for his lonely child is the most pathetic episode in the life of Meredith; baffled love and sorrow and retributive tragedy are enshrined in the story, which in its most appealing features only covers a few years. It was, in a way, a repetition of family history. Remembering his own lonely —perchance loveless—boyhood (for his father, Augustus Meredith, as I have related, though indulgent and anxious to win his son's affections and sympathies, never succeeded in reaching that remote and sensitive heart), George Meredith made affecting efforts to recover the mistakes of the past and win the love of his own son—the only thing in the world he then loved; the handsome boy, ill-fated inheritor of a double portion of warring temperament and

JANET DUFF GORDON (MRS. ROSS). THE ORIGINAL OF ROSE JOCELYN IN "EVAN HARRINGTON," AND, PARTLY, OF JANET ILCHESTER, IN "HARRY RICHMOND"

From the portrait by G. F. Watts, R.A.

talent, was of curious psychology; he was rather cold and unresponsive to his father; his sympathies, in turn, were never won, and eventually came long estrangement between these two acutely sensitive natures so much alike, each with a power of wounding the other most pitiful. George Meredith had to suffer the same regrets and pangs which had been the portion of his father before him in relation to his own personality. As he sorrowfully wrote from experience in *Richard Feverel*, he was contending with Fate for the boy.

In both the cases of George and Arthur Meredith the boys were spoilt and brought up in an ill-advised and uncertain manner; both in the position of an only child, they each lacked the society of other children and were too much imbued with that of adults. How injudicious, at times, George Meredith was in the treatment of his son is evidenced by a story related to me by Sir Francis Burnand, who was a spectator of the incident and said he never could forget the unpleasant memory. It was in 1859, when Burnand was staying with Meredith and Maurice FitzGerald at Esher, and on one occasion, at dinner, Arthur Meredith—then a child of some six years of age—wishing to emulate his elders, asked for some wine. The request was refused. The boy persisted, till, at last, Meredith, in a fine irritation, cried: "If you will have it you *shall*," and compelled the boy to drink a tumbler full of wine, with the result that Arthur was rendered almost unconscious, and then very ill, in which state he remained for several days. Certainly an efficacious, if drastic, lesson in obedience and temperance. But in the main, Meredith's life with his little son, in the days when they were all in all to each other,

makes a pleasant picture, with the Surrey lanes and heaths and dear old woods of Copsham for a setting.

In the summer of 1861 Meredith went abroad with Arthur, and arranged to meet W. C. Bonaparte Wyse there. Father and son duly set forth, and travelled via Ostend and the Rhine. They stayed, as arranged, at Zürich, in July, and then went on to Innsbrück, and to Meran in the Tyrol.

They had joined Bonaparte Wyse without mishap, and he accompanied them across the Alps. Meredith was much struck by the Rosanna, which reminded him somehow of his friend Maxse, to whom his poem *By the Rosanna* was accordingly dedicated. He was also greatly impressed by the Alps, which seemed to him something more than earth.

Meredith and Arthur travelled to Venice, and Wyse to Como to visit his mother. Meredith had now greatly improved in health. He and his small boy bathed in the Adriatic daily and walked the Lido. He took pleasure in finding the exact spot where the great bell of the asylum can be seen to swing in the sunset as described in a poem of Shelley's.[1]

From Milan, in August, Meredith proceeded to Como, where he rejoined Bonaparte Wyse. He was received very affably at the Villa Ciani, near Este, by his friend's mother, Lady Wyse, the daughter of Lucien Bonaparte (brother of the Emperor Napoleon). Here, too, he met the Princess's daughter, Adeline Wyse, with her fiancé,

[1] "I looked, and saw between us and the sun
A building on an island. . . .
And on the top an open tower, where hung
A bell which in the radiance swayed and swung,—
We could just hear its hoarse and iron tongue:
The broad sun sank behind it, and it tolled . . ."
Julian and Maddalo.

General Stephane Türr, an officer of Garibaldi's and the original promoter of the Panama Canal in 1878. Her sister, Marie Wyse, married Rattazzi, the Piedmontese minister.

Meredith flattered the Princess with full-bodied compliments, and half fell in love with Adeline Wyse, who, however, married her general soon after. Life at the Villa was very pleasant. All the party, ladies and gentlemen, bathed together in the Lake of Como, and at dinner they were convivial with some Royal Tokay, presented to General Türr by King Victor. Riding and driving and music whiled away the time. Lady Wyse received a pension of £2000, and the daughters of £1000, a year from their cousin, the Emperor Napoleon III.

The Merediths returned home to Copsham in September, stopping a few days in Paris. But Arthur longed for home, despite dinners at Véfours and Les Trois Frères, and so Meredith sacrificed his own inclinations and cut short his time in Paris. His letters at this date prove his entire devotion to his little son: he acted as nurse and governess, as he said, held the child in his arms when restless and sleepless, doctored him when necessary, and eventually got him home safely with the juvenile mind considerably improved.

Meredith himself was in much better health and able to work as the result of the tour.

In the spring of 1862 he was busy with his forthcoming new volume of poems, and at this date also he commenced his comedy, *The Sentimentalists*.[1]

[1] The comedy, apparently, did not develop at this time, and the project was put aside until about 1870, when scenes 6-8 were written. In 1883, when Meredith's *Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth* was published, the book contained a notice of "Forthcoming Publications" which mentioned *The Sentimentalists: a Comedy*. Then after another long interval, it seems Meredith rewrote, in 1895-1900, the first five

Modern Love and Poems of the English Roadside, dedicated to Captain Maxse, when published in the spring of 1862, attracted very little attention and shared the fate of the earlier volume of verse in 1851, despite the brilliant championship of Swinburne. Meredith was prepared for an adverse verdict by experience. He said he expected a severe drubbing from the reviewers. His anticipations of unfavourable reviews were soon realised. An adverse notice of the poems appeared in *The Spectator* for 24th May, 1862, wherein it was said :

" Mr George Meredith is a clever man, without literary genius, taste, or judgment. The effect of the book on us is that of clever, meretricious, turbid pictures by a man of some vigour, jaunty manners, quick observation, and some pictorial skill, who likes writing about naked human passions, but does not bring either original imaginative power or true sentiment to the task. . . . Meddling causelessly, and somewhat pruriently, with a deep and painful subject on which he has no convictions to express, he sometimes treats serious themes with a flippant levity that is exceedingly vulgar and unpleasant."

By the Rosanna was classified with " spasmodic ostentation of ' fast ' writing. Mr Meredith evidently thinks mud picturesque, as indeed it may be, but all picturesqueness is not poetry."

scenes. After the author's death the comedy was collated by Sir J. M. Barrie. It was produced at the Duke of York's Theatre, on 2nd March, 1910, with Miss Fay Davis, Miss Mary Jerrold, and Mr Dennis Eadie in the principal parts. Although the piece was admitted to be all very exquisite and fragile—a dainty comedy in porcelain, let us say—and the Georgian costumes picturesque, it was found to be both artificial and ethereal, and lacking in the dramatic sense.

This rather fatuous disquisition aroused the ire of Swinburne, who, devoting his attention primarily to a defence of *Modern Love*, replied with a long letter which appeared in the issue for 7th June. He protested against "this sort of criticism as applied to one of the leaders of English literature. . . . Praise or blame should be thoughtful, serious, careful when applied to a work of such subtle strength, such depth of delicate power, such passionate and various beauty, as the leading poem of Mr Meredith's volume; in some points, as it seems to me (and in this opinion I know that I have weightier judgments than my own to back me), a poem above the aim and beyond the reach of any but its author. Mr Meredith is one of the three or four poets now alive whose work, perfect or imperfect, is always as noble in design as it is often faultless in result. The present critic falls foul of him for dealing with 'a deep and painful subject on which he has no convictions to express.' There are pulpits enough for all preachers in prose; the business of verse-writing is hardly to express convictions; and if some poetry, not without merit of its kind, has at times dealt in dogmatic morality, it is all the worse and all the weaker for that. As to subject, it is too much to expect that all schools of poetry are to be for ever subordinate to the one just now so much in request with us, whose scope of sight is bounded by the nursery walls; that all Muses are to bow down before her who babbles, with lips yet warm from their pristine pap, after the dangling delights of a child's coral, and jingles with flaccid fingers one knows not whether a jester's or a baby's bells."[1]

[1] Swinburne's *Faustine* had been published in the previous number of *The Spectator*, 31st May, 1862.

He might have quoted the words which Meredith prefixed to *Modern Love*: "This is not meat for little people or for fools."

In addition to the poem of *Modern Love*, the volume contained twenty-two other pieces. Most of those which may be classified as genre had originally appeared in *Once a Week*. Of the rest, the finest was the *Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn*, and it is strange that the reviewer in *The Spectator* could not unbend to admit its merits.

The notices of the book elsewhere were not remarkable. Maxse wrote the review in *The Morning Post* from proofs, without seeing the published volume.[1]

The poems were much admired by Robert Browning, who told Meredith he was astounded at their originality and delighted by their naturalness and beauty.

In June, 1862, Meredith first spoke of taking a house (which he called Sir T. More's) at Chelsea conjointly with Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Swinburne. In the same letter he alluded to the report that Rossetti had buried his manuscript poems in his wife's coffin.[2]

[1] Frederick Maxse had married, in 1861, Cecilia, daughter of Colonel Steel. Mrs Maxse died in 1918. The children of the marriage were Lieut.-General Sir Ivor Maxse, Mr L. J. Maxse, of *The National Review*, and two daughters, one of whom married Lord Edward Cecil in 1894. Meredith and Oscar Wilde were among the guests at the wedding.

[2] Rossetti's wife, Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal, died from the effects of laudanum in February, 1862, and the poet-painter was overwhelmed with grief. Mr Edmund Gosse, in his *Life of A. C. Swinburne*, relates: "Swinburne is said to have been present when Rossetti thrust the sole manuscript of his poems into his wife's coffin, and it was to his marvellous memory that Morris, Meredith, and Burne-Jones principally trusted for the reconstruction of those lost lyrics."

It was in connection with his work as Reader for Chapman and Hall, involving attendance for a whole day each week at the office in Piccadilly, which caused Meredith to enter into this arrangement to take a room and some share of the housekeeping expenses at Queen's (then called Tudor) House, 16 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, during the memorable occupation of the house by the Rossetti brothers and Swinburne. It was manifestly inconvenient to get back to Copsham Cottage late in the evening, particularly in the winter, and the Chelsea proposition seemed a very suitable and pleasant solution of the difficulty, for here was talented and apparently congenial society, and certainly the house was one of the most delightful in London. It was, however, an error of Meredith's to describe the place as Sir Thomas More's house : this had stood farther west on the site of what is now Beaufort Street, Chelsea. And Mr Edmund Gosse, in his *Life of A. C. Swinburne*, was also incorrect in stating that part of the house had been occupied by Queen Katherine Parr.

No. 16 Cheyne Walk was built in 1717, as recorded in the Survey of Chelsea issued by the London County Council, and its design and architectural features are in conformation with the building style of that date. It was erected upon part of the " Great Garden " of the Manor House, which house in earlier days had covered the ground east of Winchester House up to what is now No. 18 Cheyne Walk—two doors from Rossetti's house. In his time the garden was much larger than it is now. It reached back to Oakley Crescent, and extended east to Manor Street. Meredith, in after years, used to say that so hilarious were the post-prandial meetings of Rossetti's guests in the garden that Mrs Carlyle

had to send round to beg them to make less noise, as Carlyle was disturbed at his lucubrations. In such case the garden festivities at No. 16 must have been very obstreperous, as No. 5 Cheyne Row was some considerable distance away, with Oakley Street intervening.

The name "Queen's House" arose from three erroneous traditions which associated the house with Queen Katherine Parr, Queen Catherine of Braganza, and Queen Elizabeth, who had a mulberry-tree in the garden dedicated to her name. "Queen's House," without a distinguishing Christian name, avoids invidiousness and no doubt placates the three royal shades: but the place needs no adventitious associations with virtuous queens to render it deeply interesting. It suffices that it is a perfect example of an early eighteenth-century house, and that here the Rossettis, Meredith, and Swinburne lived together in a quaint attempt at joint housekeeping and domestic intimacy which made no provision for the eccentricities of genius and the clash of highly strung nervous temperaments. And even in those days, fifty-five years antecedent to "war work," servant difficulties were not unknown, for we find Dante Rossetti (the managing director of the quartet of two widowers and two bachelors) writing in January, 1863: "I have been a martyr to unsatisfactory servants here, and have been asking all my friends if they know any desirable ones. Our household consists of four men, two of whom only, myself and Mr Swinburne, are at all constant inmates." The younger brother, W. M. Rossetti, has given some interesting details of the household and of the not altogether sympathetic atmosphere which soon settled over it:

THE BACK AND GARDEN OF 16 CHEYNE WALK, CHELSEA, AS IN D. G. ROSSETTI'S TIME

From a contemporary photograph in the possession of Mr. Reginald Blunt

"For the Cheyne Walk house . . . Rossetti was to be the tenant, paying a rent (assuredly a very moderate one) of £100 a year, besides—if I remember right—a premium of £225 upon entry. As his sub-tenants for defined portions of the building there were to be three persons—Mr Swinburne, George Meredith, and myself. Of course, each of us three was to pay something to Dante; though the latter did not wish me, and in fact did not allow me, to continue any such payment after affairs had got into their regular course. We were all to dine together, if present together in the house. Mr Swinburne was generally present, Mr Meredith much less constantly. I came on three fixed days of the week, but not on any others unless some particular occasion arose. Swinburne, and I think Meredith, had their respective sitting-rooms in which they received their personal visitors.[1] I had, and required, a bedroom only.

[1] Meredith's sitting-room was that to the right of the entrance hall. It is panelled, like the rest of the house, and contains a remarkable ornamented mantelpiece put in by D. G. Rossetti. This room was used also as the common dining-room. The corresponding room to the left of the hall was assigned to Swinburne as his study. Rossetti's studio was the fine room at the back, and his bedroom was over it, opening on to a balcony. The long drawing-room on the first floor in front was not often used; the bedroom over it was Swinburne's presumably, and Meredith's an adjoining smaller room on this top floor with a fine view of the river and the charm of sunrise.

There have been other notable occupants of 16 Cheyne Walk. Sir Hall Caine lived here, in 1881-1882, with Rossetti during the last year of the painter's life, and he fully describes the house and garden in his *Recollections of D. G. Rossetti* and *My Story*. The Rev. H. R. Haweis, Dr H. G. Plimmer, and Jacques Blumenthal, the composer, were subsequent tenants, and the house is now (1920) occupied by Lord Sterndale, the Master of the Rolls.

It is also of interest to remember that this is the house Thackeray is said to have had in mind in his description of the residence of Isabel Lady Castlewood in *Henry Esmond*: "They rowed up at length to the pretty village of Chelsey, where the nobility have

"Dante Rossetti was by this time familiar with Mr Meredith, whom he had seen increasingly for some three years past, and whose talents and work he seriously, though not uncritically, admired. . . . Mr Meredith and Rossetti entertained a solid mutual regard, and got on together amicably, yet without that thorough cordiality of give-and-take which oils the hinges of daily intercourse. It would have been difficult for two men of the literary order of mind to be more decisively unlike. The reader of their works—not to speak of the students of Rossetti's paintings—will not fail to perceive this. Rossetti was not at all a mere recluse, incapable of taking very good care of himself in the current transactions of life; he had, on the contrary, a large share of shrewdness and of business aptitude, and a quick eye for 'the main chance' in all contingencies where he chose to exercise it. He understood character, and (though often too indulgent to its shadier side) he knew how to deal with it, and had indeed rather a marked distaste for that inexpert class of persons who waver on the edge of life without ever throwing themselves boldly into it, and gripping at the facts. But Mr Meredith was incomparably more a man of the world and man of society, scrutinising all sorts of things, and using them as his material in the commerce of life and in the field of intellect. Even in the matter of household routine, he found that Rossetti's arrangements, though ample for comfort of a more or less off-hand kind, were not conformable to his standard. Thus it pretty soon became

many handsome country houses; and so came to my Lady Viscountess's house, a cheerful new house in the row facing the river, with a handsome garden behind it, and a pleasant look-out both towards Surrey and Kensington."

apparent that Mr Meredith's sub-tenancy was not likely to stand much wear and tear, or to outlast the temporary convenience which had prompted it. I could not now define precisely how long it continued —perhaps up to the earlier days of 1864.[1] It then ceased, without, I think, any disposition on either side that it should be renewed. Friendly intercourse between the two men continued for some years, and gradually wore out without any cause or feeling of dissension."

One is constrained to admit the accuracy of the above diagnosis of the characteristics of this curious Chelsea "bachelor" coterie. Meredith was the first to realise the impossibility of its continuance, and he was the first to go. Many curious stories have arisen since to account for his departure, whereas mental irritability and the heat of what the young lady in one of Sir Arthur Pinero's plays termed the "Artistic Temperature" are all-sufficient reasons for the break-up of the Cheyne Walk arrangement. The most popular of these legends attributes Meredith's flight to disgust at the habits of Rossetti, more particularly at his late breakfast, when the painter was alleged to have "devoured like an ogre five poached eggs that had slowly bled to death on five slabs of bacon."[2] Probably this story had its origin in a humorous remark of

[1] Mr W. M. Rossetti later informed me: "My brother, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, with his three sub-tenants, entered on the tenancy of 16 Cheyne Walk in October, 1862. Meredith was there at times up to some such date as April, 1863."

[2] Mr Wilfrid Scawen Blunt states in his *Diary* that Mr Wilfrid Meynell thus related to him the true version, as he heard it from Meredith, of Meredith's quarrel with Rossetti. "They were at breakfast one morning, and had a dispute about a trifle, and Rossetti, resenting something Meredith had said, told him that if he said it

Meredith's, which he never contemplated being recorded in the formality of print, and certainly he, as a panegyrist of good feeding, would scarcely be expected to take exception to the National Breakfast in substantial ration. Therefore, when this legend was repeated again he felt constrained to indite an explanation and protest, which appeared in *The National Review*, 1909, signed "George Meredith." [1]

What Meredith actually said—or wrote—about Rossetti is preserved in an unpublished letter to Hardman of October, 1868, and in this he did comment on Rossetti's habits of rising late, near midday, and eating a quantity of thick ham and gristle with four poached eggs [2]; then working all day; at 10 P.M. going to Evans's for a supper of underdone meat and stout. In result, he said, Rossetti's nervous system was affected, and insomnia added to the trouble.

It must regretfully be concluded that there was

again he would throw a cup of tea in his face. Meredith thereupon repeated it, and Rossetti threw the tea, and Meredith left the house at once and sent for his effects during the course of the day."

[1] Another legend of Meredith's departure from Cheyne Walk traces it to his pride being hurt by the attempt of his friends there to relieve his pedal necessities arising from lack of pecuniary means. Mr Ford Madox Hueffer, in his *Ancient Lights*, states: "According to Madox Brown, the end came one day when the benevolent poets substituted for the cracked boots which he put outside his door to be cleaned a new pair of exactly the same size and make. He put on the boots, went out, and, having forwarded a cheque for the quarter's rent, never returned." Madox Brown must have been mistaken. Meredith was making quite a good income at this date, 1863. He received £200 a year from *The Ipswich Journal*, and no doubt quite another £200 as Reader to Chapman and Hall, to say nothing of what he received from his novels and poems. He was also contributing to *The Morning Post* and other papers. Meredith was always scrupulously well dressed when in London at this period, as will be seen later.

[2] Sir Hall Caine relates that Rossetti "had an enormous breakfast of six eggs or half-a-dozen kidneys."

not much affinity between Rossetti and Meredith. Sir Hall Caine, who knew so much of Rossetti in his last days, tells me that the painter said very little about Meredith either in conversation or correspondence, adding: "I am afraid we must reconcile ourselves to the conclusion that there was very little real sympathy between them, although they bore an outer respect and admiration for each other."

Friction there evidently was at 16 Cheyne Walk, and Mr Edmund Gosse, in his *Life of A. C. Swinburne*, suggests that it was incompatibility between the poet and Meredith which caused the first rift in the lute of harmony at Chelsea. He says: "Meredith was not so much delighted with Swinburne as the poet was with him. Why should it be concealed that the two men ultimately got upon the nerves of each other?" And again: "The Pre-Raphaelites had not been well advised in sharing their domestic bliss: there were too many plums in their pudding. Swinburne and George Meredith developed, in particular, a remarkable incompatibility of temper. They parted, rarely to meet again, until 1898," when, on the occasion of Meredith's seventieth birthday, Swinburne was persuaded by Mr Gosse to sign the Address of Congratulation presented to the novelist. Meredith was much touched by this, and a short time afterwards he asked Watts-Dunton to bring Swinburne over to lunch at Box Hill. After that, presumably final, meeting, friendly messages often passed between them. I may add that Watts-Dunton told me that the real cause of the coolness existing between the two former friends up till the reconciliation of 1898 was caused by Swinburne's lack of appreciation of

Meredith's later novels. Not receiving any congratulations on the publication of *One of our Conquerors* and *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* and *The Amazing Marriage* from Swinburne, the author inquired the reason why, and the poet frankly replied that he could not read them, could not get through them. This, from such an omnivorous novel reader as Swinburne, was stinging comment on the torpitude he found in these last novels, and Meredith deeply resented it. Swinburne elsewhere commented that these later books were " worrying in their style," and he once made the remark that what Meredith did was " to mar a curious tale in telling it " (*King Lear*). After reading *Beauchamp's Career* in 1876, Swinburne wrote to Morley :

" Full of power and beauty and fine truthfulness as it is, what a noble book it might and should have been, if he would but have forgone his lust of epigram and habit of trying to tell a story by means of riddles that hardly excite the curiosity they are certain to baffle ! By dint of revulsion from Trollope on this hand and Braddon on that, he seems to have persuaded himself that limpidity of style must mean shallowness, lucidity of narrative must imply triviality, and simplicity of direct interest or positive incident must involve 'sensationalism.' It is a constant irritation to see a man of such rarely strong and subtle genius, such various and splendid forces of mind, do so much to justify the general neglect he provokes. But what noble powers there are visible in almost all parts of his work."

With regard to the earlier incompatibility that affected Meredith's relations with Swinburne, it

must in fairness be stated that there was no actual quarrel when the former left Cheyne Walk. They exchanged friendly letters in 1867-1868; Swinburne paid a visit to Meredith, at Kingston, in 1867; and Meredith stood by Swinburne when the storm aroused by *Poems and Ballads* burst upon the poet in 1866. Just before that volume was published Meredith wrote sagely to the young author, warning him to be careful, for the Lion of British Prudery was already growling. He said he wished to see Swinburne take his place as the leading poet, and highly praised the *Ode on Insurrection in Candia.*

As early as 1861 Meredith had perceived the powers and limitations of Swinburne when he said his friend was not subtle, but would become famous. In 1873 he termed him the finest poet and truest artist of the new generation, apart from a certain erotic obsession. As the years passed, his admiration for the poet's work increased yet more, and it is notable that two of the last letters written by Meredith, but a month before his own death, were both in tribute to Swinburne. To Watts-Dunton he wrote Swinburne was the greatest of lyrical poets; and to the editor of *The Times* his tribute likened the name of Swinburne to a star shining in English literature.

That was a fine epitaph upon the singer of the silvern voice, and it cancels the petty misunderstandings which arose from the too close contact of two highly strung temperaments during a brief period of swiftly passing mortal life. Truly *ars longa, vita brevis.*

CHAPTER VII

ARTHUR MEREDITH AND HIS FATHER. MEREDITH AS A TALKER. MEREDITH'S SECOND MARRIAGE

IN the summer of 1862 Meredith made several pleasant excursions. In August he accompanied the Cotter Morisons on their yacht, the *Irene*, for a run from the Isle of Wight, touching at Weymouth and Torquay, to the Channel Islands. He wrote in high spirits, on the 16th, from Ryde Pier Hotel to William Hardman.

By 7th September he was staying with his friend, Johnson, a bullion broker, at the George Inn, Marlow, and later at Hoddesdon, whence he visited Hatfield and Panshanger. He was compelled to extend his absence from Copsham Cottage for several weeks longer, owing to his housekeeper's niece developing smallpox there. For the same reason he decided to send his son Arthur, now nine years old, to boarding-school. He came to this decision, to part with the only person he loved, very reluctantly. His choice of a school naturally fell upon that of his friend, Augustus Jessopp.

Accordingly, after spending a few days with Edward Chapman, at Hollyshaw, Camden Park, Tunbridge Wells, at the end of September, Meredith pronounced the dread word, and he and Arthur, already breeched for school, set out for Norfolk, where the boy became a pupil at King Edward the VI.'s School, just inside the Erpingham Gate of the Cathedral Close of Norwich. In the schoolroom,

AUGUSTUS JESSOPP AND HIS WIFE
From a photograph about 1860

formerly the chapel of St John, with its fine fifteenth-century archway and stone staircase, Nelson had been a pupil just a hundred years before.

Meredith stayed a little while with the Jessopps to see his son settled at school, and accompanied the headmaster on a brief visit to St John's College, Cambridge, whence he wrote to William Hardman.

On returning to Norwich much paternal heart-beating was caused by an accident which befell Arthur Meredith in the school gymnasium, and his agitated parent related the incident to Hardman, describing how the boy fell from the top of a ladder seventeen feet to the crypt floor.

It is pleasant to picture Meredith entering simply into the life of the school at Norwich in these few days of recreation snatched from his journalistic and "reader" work and the rather laborious toil which attended the evolution of *Sandra Belloni*, which he was now writing.

He was back at Copsham Cottage by 4th November, when he penned that amusing letter in rhyme to Mrs Jessopp concerning some deficiencies in Arthur Meredith's school outfit. This was a very clever and amusing parody of Mrs Browning's poem, *The Lady Geraldine's Courtship*, wherein he caught the veritable trick of her quaint phraseology.

Meredith hoped to get down to Norwich again at the end of the term. But apparently he was prevented, and great preparations were made at home for the return of the son and heir together with seasonable Christmas festivities. Of course Meredith's arrangements with other friends had to be cancelled if they did not coincide with the wishes of his boy. For instance, it was proposed to go to a theatre with Hardman, who inclined to the Strand

Theatre, with its Marie Wilton, puns, and burlesque: but Arthur Meredith desired a pantomime, and it was so.

After much epistolary exhortation against larks in the train, Arthur arrived safely from Norwich, and Meredith had no fault to find with the condition of his recovered treasure; he wrote to Jessopp, on 23rd December, expressing pleasure at the appearance, physical and mental, of his "little man."

Meredith and his son spent Christmas Day at 27 Gordon Street, with the Hardmans, and on Boxing Day Arthur's wishes were duly carried out by a visit to the pantomime at Drury Lane. Edmund Falconer commenced his management of the theatre that night, and is reported to have spent £10,000 on the venture. The opening night was very rowdy, and Hardman relates of this outing with the Merediths:

"We went to Drury Lane on Boxing Night, and such a pandemonium I have rarely witnessed. The first piece was acted in dumb show, not a word could we hear. The fights in pit and gallery were frequent. The shower of orange peel from the gods into the pit was quite astounding. The occupants of the latter place made feeble efforts to throw it back again, but, of course, never got it any further than the first tier of boxes. I was glad to see the thing once, but you won't catch me there again."

Despite his work, January was devoted by Meredith to giving his boy a good time. But the last day of the holidays inevitably came, when, after a final expedition to the Bank of England and Tower of London, followed by a feast of oysters and cakes,

GEORGE MEREDITH AND HIS SON ARTHUR
From a photograph about 1862

Arthur was seen off from Shoreditch station on his return to Norwich. He was an unemotional child, and seeing his father's grief at their separation calmly remarked: "Never mind, papa: it is no use minding it: I shall soon be back to you"—certainly a reversing of the usual procedure between parent and child at holiday terminations.

When the philosophic youth came back to Copsham Cottage in April, 1863, for the next holidays, he developed measles, when his father nursed him and sat up most of the night to give the child barley water. This illness served as a pretext for keeping Arthur at home for four months.

Every allusion to Arthur at this period voices pathetically Meredith's love and solicitude for his son. During these long summer holidays of 1863 the boy had an alarming accident, which greatly agitated Meredith. Arthur was out on the Common alone, when a friend of Meredith's named Wyndowe, from Esher, rode up. He foolishly put the boy on the horse, to give him a ride; but letting go the reins, the horse bolted, the child fell and was dragged by the stirrup for fifty yards over the grass and furze—which probably saved his life. He was much shaken, but no bones were broken, and he was well again in a few days. But Meredith's anxiety continued long after the boy returned to school, and the parental letters to Dr Jessopp make pathetic reading.

To retrace a little in date, for a few days, in January, Meredith, Hardman and James Virtue were guests of the Cotter Morisons on board the yacht *Irene* for a trip to Cherbourg and the Channel Islands. The weather was very rough, and most of the party were ill.

In July, 1863, Meredith (and Arthur) again visited Seaford, despite the painful memories of his first wife that place must have conjured up. Once more he was with the modern Amphitryon, Maurice FitzGerald, and enjoying the gastronomy of yore in Marine Terrace. The party of friends comprised Frank Burnand, Maurice and Gerald FitzGerald, Signor Vignati, Hyndman, and S. Laurence, the painter.

Henry Mayers Hyndman, the future leader of Socialism, was at this date a young man of twenty-one, an undergraduate of Trinity College, and a member of the Sussex County Eleven. He had joined the party at Seaford as a friend of Maurice FitzGerald, and in his *Record of an Adventurous Life* he gives some interesting impressions of this sojourn in " a sort of village of the dead " :

" The villagers around us knew nothing and cared less about the laughing, chaffing crew who, with the sons of the chief local landowners, were making merry in one of the few decent houses on the front, or at the New Inn, already some centuries old.

" Though Seaford was the spot at which Meredith's first wife had carried on the intrigue with Wallis, the painter, which led to their separation, Meredith shook off the trouble this had occasioned him and was almost as jolly as Burnand. . . . But Meredith in particular was at his best in those days, and being quite at home with the men around him, and with no audience he felt it incumbent upon him to dazzle, and waiting to appreciate his good things, he delivered himself without effort or artifice of all the really profound and poetic and humorous thoughts on men and things that welled continually within him in a manner that I recall with delight these

long years afterwards. It was on one of these occasions, when we were all sitting together on the beach, tossing stones lightly into the sea, and Meredith was discoursing with even more than ordinary vivacity and charm, that Burnand suddenly came out with, 'Damn you, George; why won't you write as you talk?' Why Meredith, with such a wonderful gift of clear, forcible language as he possessed and was master of, should have deliberately cultivated artificiality I never have been able to comprehend. He had a perfectly marvellous flow of what I may call literary high spirits throughout his life, and his unaffected, natural talk, such as this at Seaford, was altogether delightful. But his writings showed even then to my eye, young and inexperienced as I was, little trace of this unforced outpouring of wisdom and wit; while Meredith's conversation was almost equally artificial, not to say stilted, except with men and women he had known well for years. . . . This show talk and show writing of Meredith was quite as brilliant as the unconsidered outpourings of the natural man, and he said perhaps even cleverer things; but his wit was much more sardonic, and somehow you could hear the clank of the machinery all the time."

When Meredith went to stay with him at Cambridge during May Newmarket week of 1864, Hyndman states that Meredith met various undergraduates in his rooms in Rose Street. He talked volubly to them in an artificial, showy way, entering into discussion about their pursuits and sports of all kinds without knowing much about these recreations. At the same time, Mr Hyndman adds that Meredith was then in very good physical condition, and threw

him in a wrestling bout : " In fact he was all wire and whipcord without a spare ounce of flesh upon him."

There is confirmation of the statement that Meredith was artificial in conversation, when with strangers he sought to impress, in Mrs Ross's book. Alluding to the fact that Kinglake and Meredith did not care for each other much, she says : " Both were shy in different ways, and both were at their best when alone with one or two friends. My Poet, in the early days when I saw so much of him, was a delightful companion when he knew he was liked ; before strangers his shyness took the form of asserting himself rather loudly, and trying to be epigrammatic and witty ; he gave one the impression that he was not quite sure on what footing he stood."

Sir William Hardman also related an amusing anecdote of Meredith's " show " talk in an incident which happened in 1863, when they both met at dinner a remarkable woman, Mrs Atkinson, widow of the celebrated Siberian traveller. She had been a great traveller also, and had spent twenty years in Russia and carried out a fourteen days' ride into Tartary. She was the author of a book relating her many adventurous experiences. To continue in Hardman's words :

" Mrs Atkinson is a bright-eyed, intelligent woman, small in stature. She polished Meredith off in fine style. He was in high spirits, talking fast and loud. The Surrey hills, the Hindhead, and Devil's Punchbowl, were the subjects of conversation, and G. M. asserted (I know not on what authority) that the view from the Hindhead was very like *Africa*. Mrs A. pricked up her ears, and bending forward across the table asked in a clear but

low voice : ' And, pray, sir, may I ask what part of Africa you have visited ? ' Alas ! poor Robin ! he has never been further south than Venice. No one could be more amused at his own discomfiture than he was himself, and he gave a very vivid description of his sensations when he saw Mrs A. preparing the inevitable enquiry which he foresaw. As he had talked about Africa without having been there, the great Siberian traveller was disposed evidently to hold him lightly, for later in the dinner the talk was of certain cannibals who are to be imported as the last Sensation Exhibition, and the question of feeding them was mooted. ' Oh ! ' says Meredith, ' there will be no difficulty about that, we shall feed them on the disagreeable people and those we don't like.' ' Yes, indeed,' said Mrs Atkinson, ' and that gentleman (meaning Meredith) would be one of the first to go.' Conceive the chaff, the laughter. We all of us liked the little woman immensely, and mean to improve the acquaintance."

At a later period there is an interesting note on Meredith's conversation by Henry Sidgwick, who writes : " *April* 13*th*, 1886. Last night we dined with Leslie Stephen and met George Meredith, whom I liked, but was somewhat disappointed in his conversation. He was not affected or conceited and talked fluently, but not exactly with ease, nor did his phrases seem to me often to have any peculiar aptness ; once or twice there was an amusing stroke of humorous fancy, as when he talked of an unhappy singer's voice being ' like the soul of a lemon in purgatory ' ; but these things did not come often." [1]

[1] Mr Wilfrid Scawen Blunt noted in 1894 that Meredith's conversation was " like one dictating to a secretary, a constant search for epigrams."

And in 1889 Henry Murray relates how Meredith humorously talked against water-drinking, and cited the horrible case of a fellow-student in Germany who practised the fell habit and died suddenly in great agony, leaving behind a solemn request that the autopsy should be performed by his friend, George Meredith. "When I made the first incision, the glitter of the stalactites in the poor fellow's gastric cavity positively blinded me—I had to wear blue glasses for months after."

Comyns Carr suggested that Meredith cultivated conversation on subjects often outside the province of the novelist's art with the ulterior motive of presenting the matter or problem in his novels :

"He loved to submit his creations to the instant pressure of their time, and with this purpose it was his business, no less than his pleasure, to equip himself intellectually with garnered stores of knowledge in fields into which the ordinary writers of fiction rarely enter. It was not, of course, to be supposed that he could claim equal mastery in all, although his intellect was so active and agile that his limitations were not easily discerned. I remember one day having introduced him to an old gentleman, whose long life had been spent in a study of the drawings of the old masters, to whom Meredith, with inimitable fluency, was expounding the peculiar virtues of the art of Canaletto. Meredith was eloquent, but the discourse somehow failed to impress the aged student. When they had parted his sole commentary to me was : 'Your friend—Mr Meredith, I think you said—endeavoured to persuade me that he understood Canaletto, but he did not.' . . . It must be conceded by all who knew him well

that Meredith was not often caught tripping in the discussion of any topic in which his intellect had been actively engaged. Sometimes—and then, perhaps, rather in a spirit of audacious adventure and for exercise of his incomparable powers of expression—he would make a bold sortie into realms of knowledge that were only half-conquered. But this was, for the most part, only when he had an audience waiting on his words. When he had only a single companion to listen, there was no man whose talk was more penetrating or more sincere."

Of course as years went by and Meredith became more and more famous, his conversation was directed increasingly to secure an effect, and there was then more excuse for his didactics in the knowledge that his adulatory auditors, in many cases, intended his remarks for subsequent publication. An even less pleasing trait of Meredith in conversation was his habit, particularly at table when guests were present, of exercising his wit at the expense of his household. It is a curious fact that sensitive and shy people, quick to take offence at any personalities or slights directed at them, are the most prone to wound others by ill-timed humour and personal remarks of a disconcerting nature. Thackeray was another case in point. As a specimen of Meredith's lighter and less offensive badinage, one may offer the story told by Mr Clodd of the parlour-maid who, on removing the remains of a dish from table, asked: "If you please, sir, does this puddin' want savin'?" To which Meredith solemnly replied: "Now, my good girl, you, I believe, a churchgoer, ask me if this puddin' wants savin'. Do you think that the puddin' has a soul, that it stands in need of salva-

tion, as we are told we all do? Take it away, Elizabeth, and let me never hear you ask such a funny question again."

Arthur having returned to school, Meredith, on 20th August, 1863, crossed to Paris, where by arrangement he met Hardman, who has left a record of their three days together in France :

"PARIS, *August 21st.* Letter from George Meredith announcing his approach. He left via Newhaven last night, and ought to have been in Paris about 11.30. He stopped at Rouen to see the *Joan of Arc*, and to call on an author who had submitted certain work to the Chapmans. He arrived about 2.30. Joyful greetings. We dined by Robin's request at Véfour's, a great mistake. Between Véfour's and the Trois Frères there is such a difference as between the University Club and the 'London' (corner of Chancery Lane). Meredith and I strolled smoking along the Champs Élysées in the evening—very pleasant, and not offensive like our own beastly Haymarket. Robin brought me *Once a Week* containing my article on *America: An Imaginary Tour*, published August 15, and also put Renan's *Life of Jesus* into his bag for me. We think him not looking well—his son Arthur's accident has naturally been a matter of great anxiety.

"PARIS, *August 22nd.* Chartered two carriages, and drove about, visiting the Louvre and other places. Dined at Trois Frères, Robin and I going first to order the dinner, and then returning to our hotel. We were the merriest of parties. Charles, the waiter, was an admirable type of the aristocracy of waiters. . . .

"PARIS, *August 23rd (Sunday).* We went to Versailles by the Avenue de Passy, through Sèvres,

and arrived safely at eleven o'clock. Could not get Meredith past the more modern French pictures of battles. . . . We had a delightful drive back through St Cloud and the Bois de Boulogne. Expressions of admiration at the beauty of the drive were exhausted. Truly the Emperor is a wonderful Œdile."

On the evening of this day, Meredith left to join his friend, Lionel Robinson—"Poco"—at Grenoble. They visited the Grande Chartreuse, and walked through Dauphiné, accomplishing some twelve to thirteen hours pedestrianism every day. By Mont Genèvre they passed into Italy, and stayed at Turin. They returned by Lago Maggiore and Piedmont to Switzerland, and thence to Dijon, where the friends parted. Robinson proceeded to Liège and Meredith to Paris, where he spent four days, returning to Copsham Cottage by 16th September.

The autumn passed, and though busy with *Sandra Belloni* and other work, Meredith became lonely and unhappy at this period. Momentous changes were impending, but, for the moment, Arthur was still the paramount thought of his father's life. Meredith longed for the boy's return at Christmas, and wrote to tell him how all the Copsham countryside was in the grip of frost, how all his toys would be ready for him, and how the father longed for his son. And when the child was home[1] Meredith told Mrs Jessopp he marvelled how he could exist away from what he called his living heart, but he was resolved to make the most of the six weeks they were to be together.

Only six months later came the domestic change

[1] During these holidays D. G. Rossetti painted a full-length portrait of Arthur Meredith, with a "Futurist" dog in the background. It was not in any way a likeness of the boy.

which caused Arthur's supreme position in his father's life to suffer inevitable displacement. In the autumn of 1863 Meredith had made the acquaintance of Mr Justin Theodore Vulliamy, a member of an old Huguenot family,[1] who, in 1857, had settled in Mickleham Vale (a few miles from Esher) at The Old House—a delightful red-brick, gabled house, built in 1636, with a background of woods and hill. Mr Vulliamy's wife (an Englishwoman, Elizabeth Bull) had recently died, and he was living here with his three unmarried daughters. By the youngest, Marie, Meredith was at once attracted. She was twenty-four years of age, and very musical. When Meredith paid another visit to the Jessopps, in April, 1864, Miss Vulliamy was also staying in Norwich, and it was in the East Anglian city that he decided that he had at last found the ideal woman for his helpmate; and here he made his courtship whilst "cathedralising"—as he termed those pleasant strolls through the picturesque Close and the meadows by the Wensum and the Yare. Meredith and Miss Vulliamy travelled back to London together.

Just after this, Frederick Sandys,[2] the artist, came to stay some weeks with Meredith at Copsham

[1] The introduction took place through N. E. S. A. Hamilton, of the Manuscript Department of the British Museum, author of *The Shakespearean Question*, 1860.

[2] Frederick Sandys, one of the most remarkable of the Pre-Raphaelite painters, was born at Norwich in 1829, and educated at the Grammar School there. He became intimate with D. G. Rossetti in 1857, and hence arose his friendship with Meredith, which increased when they were both working for *Once a Week*. Meredith said: "He is one of the most remarkable of the 'brushes' of our day, with the quaintest stolid Briton way of looking at general things. . . . Sandys has a romantic turn that lets me feed on him." Rossetti called him "the greatest living draughtsman," and Millais said he was "worth two Academicians rolled into one." Sandys's crayon portrait of Meredith's

Cottage in order to paint from the country round the background of his picture *Gentle Spring*. Soon after he began for Meredith a very successful portrait of Marie Vulliamy.

A few weeks later Meredith definitely announced his engagement in terms expressing how highly he idealised his late-found happiness, and what bright promise he built upon it for the future.

The marriage took place on 20th September, 1864, in the ancient little church of Mickleham, which stands so picturesquely at the foot of the wooded downs. The ceremony was performed by Dr Jessopp, and the witnesses who signed the register were Lionel Robinson, Annie A. Smith, and the bride's father and brother, Theodore. (Seventy-one years previously Fanny Burney and D'Arblay were married in the same church.) The first part of the honeymoon was spent at Southampton, and after a fortnight the Merediths went on to Captain Maxse's house, Ploverfield, Bursledon, a place which Meredith found very pleasant and where he could work well. One morning he awoke at 3 A.M. and wrote a poem on the subject of Cleopatra for *The Cornhill Magazine*, to be illustrated by Sandys.[1]

second wife, 1864, was one of his finest works. His *Gentle Spring*, the picture mentioned above, was exhibited in 1865. His *Medea* was crowded out of the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1868, but vehement protests, Swinburne joining heatedly in the fray, resulted in the picture being hung on the line in 1869. In his later years, Sandys was a friend of Aubrey Beardsley and the younger generation of rising artists of the nineties. He was ever a Bohemian, thriftless and rather pugnacious. He died in 1904.

[1] Apparently Meredith's poem on Cleopatra was rejected and the manuscript destroyed. Sandys's drawing of this subject did not appear in *The Cornhill Magazine* until two years later, in September, 1866, and it was then accompanied by Swinburne's poem. Both the poet and Meredith thought it poor. See *The Letters of A. C. Swinburne* (Mr Gosse's edition), vol. ii., p. 186.

The Merediths left Burlesdon towards the end of October, and went first to Mickleham, where they spent Christmas of 1864 with Mr Vulliamy, at the picturesque Old House. Writing from there on December 18th to William Hardman, Meredith gave a remarkable picture of Mickleham Downs covered with snow, over which spread the black plumes of the yew-trees. He also commented on the changes a year had brought to both of them—he married, and Hardman established at Norbiton Hall, Kingston, and become a Surrey magnate and magistrate.

And what a change from two years ago when Meredith and Arthur spent that jolly Christmas with the Hardmans in London before returning to "dear old Copsham." But now Copsham days were over, for there was not sufficient accommodation at the cottage for a wife, so whilst they were looking out for a place of their own the Merediths stayed at "The Cedars," Esher, a pleasant house near the river Mole.

His marriage and the departure from Copsham Cottage marks a distinct change in the life of Meredith. The first phase was now closed. It had been at times a lonely and perhaps a sad period, but it had been illumined by much good friendship and social pleasure, much Nature study and fine work. The new era of domestic happiness now opened auspiciously, together with a consciousness of unabated literary power; but the change in his life inevitably involved one sad circumstance—the estrangement of his son Arthur, now eleven years old. Although the boy had never warmly responded to the love which hitherto his father had wholeheartedly laid at his feet, he naturally felt the differ-

ence when a large portion of that love was diverted to another person. And from being the pivot on which his father's existence turned and one whose slightest wish had been gratified in his home, he now found himself of secondary importance, and even less after the advent of his step-brother in 1865. The juvenile tragedy of an eldest child, who has been for some years alone and supreme in his home and then is superseded, is ever a bitter one ; and in the special circumstances of Arthur Meredith, who had been his father's sole relation and much noticed in the society of his parent's adult friends, it is not surprising that the boy was jealous and keenly resentful of his altered life and lost autocracy. Unfortunately, as he grew older he did not learn to accept the change with wise philosophy. Inheriting his father's acute sensitiveness and pride, he gradually drifted away from his home, and it was found best for him to be abroad. After leaving Dr Jessopp's school he was sent, in 1867, to a school at Hofwyl, near Berne, conducted on the system of Pestalozzi, which had for its basis graduated object teaching. His education was completed at Stuttgart. His father did not encourage the idea of the boy's return home. It must have pained Meredith to recall how, only four years previously, Arthur's holidays had been the happiest weeks of the year, and so eagerly anticipated.

At intervals Meredith continued to write to his son long letters containing good advice as to health and morals. This was up to 1872, but the rift was rapidly widening, and for the next nine years apparently few, if any, letters passed between father and son. The latter complained of a lack of consideration shown towards him and that he was kept short

of money by his father. Meredith, however, seems to have been fairly generous, until a legacy from a grand-aunt made the boy more or less independent. A post was obtained for him in the firm of De Koninck at Havre. Later he was employed in a linseed warehouse at Lille. His health failed, and then, in June, 1881, Meredith broke the silence of years and remorsefully wrote to say how affected he was to hear from Lionel Robinson of Arthur's illness. He offered to allow his son some money, and invited him to come to Box Hill, where they could work together in the chalet.[1] He concluded by alluding to their long estrangement, and the pathetic impression he had acquired at their last meeting years before, that his son had no love for him.

Truly was this a sad aftermath for the love and devotion of earlier years. Perhaps Meredith perceived there was a touch of retributive fate in this repetition of family history, and at last was able to realise the feelings of his father before him in relation to himself; to understand something of that baffled affection and cold response from a son, which had been the portion of Augustus Meredith; to regret the pain with which he had pierced his own father's heart.

Arthur Meredith did not come home; he preferred to seek recovery in the mountain air of Switzerland or Italy. Eventually he went to live at Bergamo and Salò on Lake Garda. By the beginning of 1889 he was in a precarious state, and a voyage to Australia was resolved upon. But he never would accept any financial help from his father,

[1] Arthur contributed some Travel Sketches to *Macmillan's Magazine*.

Arthur Meredith

although Meredith also wrote to Arthur's step-sister, Mrs Clarke (Edith Nicolls), begging her to use her influence to get him to accept a small sum as a help towards his voyaging expenses.

Arthur had rather a trying experience on the voyage out, when the other occupant of his cabin proved to be an almost mad inebriate. At Sydney he made a partial recovery ; but after his return to England, in the spring of 1890, he failed again rapidly, and died, on 3rd September, at Woking, in a house temporarily taken by his sister. Mrs Clarke was his best friend, and she tended him to the last with the tenderest devotion. To her Meredith wrote to express his gratitude. Many sad memories must have arisen like wan ghosts in the father's mind as he recalled the past and old days at Halliford, Seaford, and Copsham.

Arthur Meredith was buried at Woking. Proud and reserved, yet self-conscious to a degree, gifted with personal beauty and some measure of talent, such was the untimely end, at the age of thirty-seven, of him who was Meredith's son and Peacock's grandson. Fated without choice to cause both his parents, whom he resembled so much, the most acute sorrow, he never found happiness himself, a victim of heredity.

CHAPTER VIII

"SANDRA BELLONI." "RHODA FLEMING." "VITTORIA." MEREDITH AT KINGSTON LODGE AND IN ITALY

EMILIA IN ENGLAND (later to be renamed *Sandra Belloni*) was published in three volumes by Chapman and Hall in April, 1864. It was the story which of all his creations caused Meredith the greatest pangs in conception. He took over three years to write it, and he was continuously hacking it about and altering it, sometimes to his satisfaction and sometimes not.

As early as May, 1861, he said he was well advanced with *Emilia Belloni*, but by November he had left her untouched for months. Seven months later, in June, 1862, he cast aside what he had done, and rewrote the whole story. In August a dreadful hitch in his work distressed him. Four months later he was again displeased with his work and cut to pieces four printed chapters of *Emilia*. In March, 1863, he was overwhelmed with disgust at *Emilia*, but thought she would do. He hoped he had finished with the troublesome damsel in July, but he had not by any means, and in November was dejected about this novel. His friends Hardman and Maxse were reading it in proof and giving some useful criticism.[1] In the same month

[1] Hardman notes in November, 1863: "Meredith . . . is to sleep here, in order to have a fight with me about my criticisms and suggestions anent the second volume of *Emilia*, the proofs of which

he said *Emilia* grieved him. In January, 1864, all he could tell Jessopp was that neither book nor author were all right. Still, he realised the story had its strong points, and he expressed the hope and conviction that he would do something better next time.

The reason for all this groaning and labour is to be accounted for by the fact that this was the author's first distinctively original work, the embryo of what may be termed the Real Meredith. Here he cast aside the influences of *The Arabian Nights* and Dickens, and the arts of the story-teller, and evolved a novel of striking interest in which incident and drama were subordinate to play and development of character mainly presented in the form of conversations, and a delicate dissection of the fine shades of thought and motive leading to action. Unfortunately this method of narrative (though it has classical precedent) often involves the description of some great scene by the mouths of other characters in the book instead of being directly and vividly recounted as part of the story proper. How far finer, for instance, might the dramatic scene in Devonshire between Emilia, Lady Charlotte, Wilfrid, and Georgiana Ford have been rendered if told in straightforward narrative instead of by the disjointed report of Georgiana. And *Sandra Belloni* suffers, like its two immediate predecessors, by ending inartistically with a letter. Meredith broke himself of this annoying habit in his subsequent books (excepting *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*), though he was seldom at his best with a finale, apart from *Vittoria* and *Beauchamp's Career*.

have just passed through my hands. These criticisms mainly relate to an absorbing tendency which possesses him for indecent double-entendre. I am determined he shall not offend the public taste, if I can help it."

Although he had not so much cause for complaint against the reviewers of his latest book as on previous occasions, he was annoyed by the notices that had appeared by 18th May, 1864. It is strange that he makes no allusion to the very full and sympathetic notice, by Richard Garnett, in *The Reader* of 23rd April, in the course of which it was said :

" *Emilia in England* is fully equal to the author's former works in humour and power, and only less remarkable in so far as it is less original. The plot is a variation on the theme of *Evan Harrington*. The comedy of that admirable novel turned on the struggle of three sisters, upheaved into a higher than their natural sphere, with the demon of Tailordom ; their frantic efforts to entomb the monstrous corpse of their plebeian origin beneath the highest available heaps of acted and spoken lies ; the vigorous resistance of that ghastly being to this method of disposing of him, and his victorious assertion of his right to walk the earth. . . . In *Emilia* we have three sisters again—the Misses Pole. . . . The situation is fundamentally the same, but so far varied that the ladies have no chance of concealing their mercantile origin, of which, indeed, to do them justice, they are not ashamed. They simply wish to get higher, and, by way of justifying their ambition to themselves, have set up a fanciful code of feelings supposed to be proper to the highest circles . . . and the gist of the present work is a sarcastic but quiet exposure of the evil these ladies wrought against their better nature."

In July there followed, in *The Westminster Review*, Justin McCarthy's article, *Novels with a Purpose*,

wherein *Emilia in England* received high praise : " I remember no character in modern literature that so faithfully pictures the nature which is filled with a genius for music "—so that Meredith's life-long complaint of lack of appreciation had but exiguous justification even in these early days.[1]

In the autumn of 1864 a translation of *Emilia in England* by E. D. Forgues appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*.

As we have seen, Meredith told Mrs Ross Emilia was a feminine musical genius whose story was based upon the career of a person in real life. Therefore, in dealing with the original of this book it will suffice to say that the character and more particularly the physical aspects of Emilia were drawn to a certain extent from Miss Emilia Macirone (Lady Hornby), whom Meredith had known well when he lived at The Limes, Weybridge, and who, some ten years later, acted as intermediary between him and his dying wife. This painful task adumbrates the good nature and faithfulness which animates the Emilia of the story. Like her, Miss Macirone—a name sounding much the same as Belloni—was the daughter of an Italian by an English wife. She had brilliant eyes, and a splendid complexion of deep, rich colouring. " A superb Italian head, with dark-banded soft hair, and dark strong eyes under unabashed soft eyelids." She was an accomplished musician, and sang exquisitely. She was unconventional for her period, and during

[1] The book was immediately appreciated by Henry Sidgwick, who wrote, in February, 1865 : " Beg, borrow, or steal *Emilia in England* ; it had such an effect on me that I employed my spare cash in buying up the man's other works." His biographers add that he was able to obtain first editions of *Richard Feverel*, *Evan Harrington*, and the others, second-hand, at something less than a shilling each.

her voyage to the Crimea, in 1855, used to sing almost every evening to a large audience of the soldiers and sailors on board. In England, when at Penn, in Buckinghamshire, and also at a farm near Kensal Green, she would go out at night in harvest time and sing to the reapers and labourers assembled in a barn. These incidents were utilised by Meredith in the scene where his Emilia goes to sing in the booth on the Common for the delectation of the members of the rural Junction Club of Ipley and Hillford (Ripley and Guildford), when the harmony of the evening was rudely interrupted by the beer-brave members of a rival club. The name of the younger Miss Macirone (Mrs Valliant), Giulia, was given to the minor character of Madame Marini in *Sandra Belloni*.

Apparently no Meredithian commentator has observed that Swinburne figures in *Sandra Belloni* under the name of Tracy Runningbrook—a sort of play upon the poet's cognomen. There is no mistaking the portrait drawn, for Tracy, like Swinburne, had red hair, green eyes, peerage blood, and the making of a famous poet. The date, 1861-1863, when Meredith was writing this book coincided with the time when he was most intimate with Swinburne, the days when they were at Copsham and Chelsea together. Therefore his presentment of the youthful poet has great interest, for no doubt the conversation of Tracy is a literal transcription of the vehement avalanche of words which characterised the original. Take the scene where Tracy discusses with Emilia the libretto he will write for her opera on the subject of their jointly beloved Italy, and when he proposes to create a daughter for Brennus. Undoubtedly here we recover an

Emilia Macirone (Lady Hornby). The original of Emilia Sandra Belloni and Vittoria

authentic echo of that flow of Swinburnean language which Meredith likened to a torrent of boiling lava, and a taste of that wealth of violent simile which enabled the poet easily to rout a merely sanguinarily garnished cabman who was dissatisfied with his fare.

Meredith also introduces the matter of Swinburne's spirited defence of *Modern Love* in the Press, though he transposes the facts, for it is Tracy Runningbrook's poem which is unjustly reviewed, and the protest is penned by Purcell Barrett. This, via Wilfrid, enabled Meredith to voice his contempt for the recent attack he had endured in *The Spectator*.

The character drawing in *Sandra Belloni* varies considerably in merit, as in most of the author's books. Emilia herself is, of course, a superlative study. All the Poles are good. Lady Charlotte is very finely drawn, and her broad-minded philosophy and serene *savoir faire*, lights and shades, are etched with consummate art. Mr Pericles—that earlier and more benevolent Svengali—is a delightfully original creation. But Mrs Chump is a failure and fatiguing; Gambier, Merthyr Powys, and Georgiana Ford are shadows, who never develop. Purcell Barrett, too, is a disappointment. Up to a certain point he is an interesting study with strong features and then suddenly he fizzles out in a damp cloud of feeble sentimentality. But perhaps his creator intended him as a dire warning against admitting sentiment into an imaginative and brooding mind. One could almost think that Meredith had taken the character and circumstances of his small son, Arthur, and was tracing out their possible development in the future.

There is much humorous observation in this book. One would have liked more *obiter dicta* from the

unnamed landlady, thankful Cockney, of Barrett's, who in her one brief appearance is profound on the subjects of metropolitan advantages and wife-beating. How amusing, too, is Emilia's definition of poetry. But Emilia could be intensely poetical in expression, as when she wore the gorgeous purple Branciani dress and said she felt as if she looked out of a rose. Naturally she was in tune with her creator's favourite aspect of nature—the clouds that attend a south-west wind.

Exquisite little scenic cameos gleam in this Surrey novel, as when Emilia and Wilfrid were by the Weir. Meredith's surroundings at Copsham are all intertwined with this book. It was by the pollard-willow near his favourite haunt, the Black Pool in the wood, that he ended the life of poor Purcell Barrett; and in his penultimate chapter, "Frost on the May Night," gazing from his cottage window he summoned his characters [1] for adieu and ranged them, lit by moonlight, in that "fair woodland court," with moss and frosted fern for flooring, that bordered The Mound.

Writers are sometimes aware when they have achieved good work, and Meredith knew his last scene in *Sandra Belloni* was good. He wrote to Maxse, when reminding his friend of the songs of nightingales they had heard in the past, to note "Frost on the May Night" at the end of *Emilia*. The memory of the scene and of Copsham Woods remained with Meredith, and thirty years later he recalled again that beautiful experience of the long ago in his poem, *Night of Frost in May*.

[1] They were very real to him. Hardman relates of Meredith's creations in *Sandra Belloni*: "To him they are evidently living beings, in fact, I know he has felt them as such for the past twelve months."

THE BLACK POOL, COPSHAM WOODS
Photograph by Mr. F. J. Williamson

So the influences of Copsham were lovely and enduring.

With the publication of *Sandra Belloni* coincided the turn in the fortunes of Meredith, who now was making quite a comfortable income by his pen. He was writing *Rhoda Fleming* and *Vittoria*, and planning *Harry Richmond*; he was writing for *The Ipswich Journal* still, and for *The Morning Post*; he was expecting to make new arrangements with Chapman and Hall that would secure him a salary of £250 or £300 a year; a publisher proposed to give him four figures for a novel. And in fact, as he put it, he had laid traps for money everywhere. His prosperity continued to increase; he joined the Garrick Club, and entertained his friends frequently.

After staying at The Cedars, Esher, during the early part of 1865, the Merediths took lodgings in Kingston-on-Thames; and in the spring they entered upon a three years' lease of Kingston Lodge, Norbiton, a quaint and pleasant little house in pseudo-Gothic style. It had a good garden, and here stood —and still stands—a tower, covered with ivy, the freak of some previous owner with a taste for decorative building. The great attraction of Kingston Lodge to Meredith was that it stood opposite to Norbiton Hall, where lived, since 1864, his valued friends, the Hardmans. Apart from this he never liked Kingston. However, he meant to stay for the term of his lease, and when he moved to do so finally and make a home where he would live for the remainder of his life.[1]

Still, Kingston Lodge has interest for Merediths, for here he finished *Rhoda Fleming* and wrote most

[1] He kept his word. He removed to Box Hill, and stayed there till the end.

of *Vittoria* and a great part of *Harry Richmond*. Here, too, was born, in July, 1865, his son, William Maxse Meredith, whose first two names perpetuate his father's friendships with Sir William Hardman and Admiral Maxse.

Like her predecessor, *Rhoda Fleming* was a long time in the making. The book was begun as far back as the spring of 1861, when Meredith intended to call it *A Woman's Battle*. Some months later he seems to have named it *The Dyke Farm*. Then the work was laid aside for a long time while *Emilia* was being wrestled with, and it was not until 1864 that Meredith's "Plain Story" was resumed. He worked hard at it during his honeymoon, near Southampton, when in the course of a month he wrote 250 pages. Meanwhile *Vittoria* came to the fore, and in January, 1865, the harassed author at The Cedars, Esher, put aside *Vittoria* in order to try and complete *Rhoda Fleming*. On 24th April, 1865, writing from Kingston, he was able to inform Jessopp that *Rhoda Fleming* was just completed except the last two chapters. He added that the novel represented six months' labour, and that he had received an offer of £400 for it from Tinsley, whereas Chapman and Hall could not entertain the idea of the work before November.

It is not clear why Chapman and Hall wanted to wait seven months before securing one of Meredith's most readable works in view of the fact that they had already published four of his books, bringing fame to the firm if not large monetary returns at the time. But Meredith could not wait, and so he accepted Tinsley's rather poor offer, and it was from the house in Catherine Street that the novel issued in this year (1865). William Tinsley relates that

KINGSTON LODGE, NORBITON. HERE MEREDITH LIVED 1865-1867 AND WROTE "RHODA FLEMING" AND "VITTORIA." THE BATTLEMENTED WING IS A MODERN ADDITION TO THE HOUSE

it had "a very poor sale," and there were apparently no contemporary reviews of any note. It was not until twenty years later that W. E. Henley's able criticism of the book appeared in *The Athenæum*, wherein he advanced the opinion that of "passion deeply felt and poignantly expressed there is such a feast in *Rhoda Fleming* as no other English novelist alive has spread." William Watson, in his *Fiction—Plethoric and Anæmic*, regarded the work as "an ill-constructed and very unequally written story, having some fine scenes and clever, if equally unattractive, character studies." On the other hand again, Arthur Symons judged *Rhoda Fleming* to be Meredith's *chef d'œuvre* in tragedy and said "the plot is woven with singular closeness and deft intricacy." The partial and enthusiastic R. L. Stevenson committed himself to the rather foolish and indemonstrable statement that *Rhoda Fleming* was "the strongest thing in English letters since Shakespeare died, and if the latter had read it he would have jumped and cried: 'Here's a fellow!'"

Literary opinion concerning the story is therefore not sharply divided, but the general opinion must be that *Rhoda Fleming*, like so many of the author's books, is of very unequal merit. Meredith himself did not think much of it in later years, and classed it with his personally despised *Poems* of 1851. He wrote to a correspondent in 1883 to the effect that neither of the books was worth reading.[1]

That is a judgment no one who cares for Meredith's work will subscribe to, for, despite its many faults, *Rhoda Fleming* is a fine and tragic story of elemental

[1] But Meredith is reported to have said to someone who expressed admiration for the character of Rhoda Fleming: "Don't you love Dahlia more? I do."

passions, of dwellers of the soil, and may be said to approximate most nearly of all Meredith's books to the subsequent mental outlook of Thomas Hardy. But, unfortunately, the events do not always spring from the actions of the characters, as in Hardy, for the plot is a most mechanical and obvious affair, with various puppets invented to oil the springs of this luculent machine. Such is Sedgett, such is Percy Waring, such is Mrs Lovell, and, most of all, such is the melodramatic Anthony Hackbut, who was a temporary reversion to the Dickensian influence and a jumble of the Jerry and Newman Noggs types. I do not find Algernon Blancove the lifeless dummy suggested by Henley. Rather is he a subtle study of a young fool and a fine foil to the acutely drawn character of Edward Blancove, who was apparently based, in some respects, upon Meredith's brother-in-law, Edward Peacock. At any rate, in addition to the same Christian name, Edward Peacock, like Blancove, studied as a barrister, and was much addicted to boxing in his chambers.

Concerning the two sisters, it must be admitted that Dahlia is rather an anæmic creation, and Rhoda an exceedingly unlovable young person, though, no doubt, her contradictory character and devotion to a person loved is a correct presentment of a certain feminine type. But these girls talk and write the language of Meredith and not that of the daughters of a farmer of 1860, when educational advantages for women were negligible, particularly in rural districts. Therefore it is a sad blow to probability when Dahlia writes from Italy such an epigrammatic remark about modesty being too hot a covering for human creatures there. And Rhoda's language

all through is entirely too fine. The means by which Sedgett meets Dahlia is left to the imagination, and there are many missing links in the story. Farmer Fleming is the best drawn character. He lives, and so does Farmer Eccles. Also Master Gammon, the champion dumpling eater and immutable rustic Stoic, and his interlocutress, Mrs Sumfit, who is a niece of Mrs Crickledon of Seaford. She uses the same words as the latter good woman in *The House on the Beach* concerning a master who daily dirtied his thirteen plates. Probably Colonel Barclay was drawn from an officer Meredith saw at Lord's in June, 1863, a Colonel M., mentioned by him in a letter as one he intended to transfer to a book.

As to the localities of the story, Queen Anne's Farm is said to have been intended for Byfleet Manor House: Queen Anne's Hill is in that neighbourhood. "Greatham" is Cobham. When the action passes to Hampshire, "Fairly Park" is Beaulieu, and "Warbeach" is probably a picture of Bursledon, where Meredith stayed, during his honeymoon, when writing this part of *Rhoda Fleming*. The book is not rich in scenic descriptions, but there are some memorable sayings within its pages, particularly one picturing the French people. Meredith ever loved France and Italy best among the nations, and now he voiced the epic of Italy.

Although the composition of *Vittoria* (or *Emilia in Italy*, as it was originally entitled) was interrupted by *Rhoda Fleming*, the Italian tale was the immediate sequel, or rather second part, of *Sandra Belloni* (*Emilia in England*). The earlier work closed with the departure of the heroine for her passionately loved Italy. Meredith had long desired

to write a romance typifying the spirit of modern Italy, in the years of revolt, 1848 and 1859, and now was his opportunity, for the subject was topical by the fresh development of political events in that country. In May, 1864, he told friends he would have to go to Italy for a little local colour.

In addition to the heroine, Meredith reintroduced in his new work the characters of Wilfrid and Adela Pole, Merthyr Powys, Gambier, and the delightful Pericles, from *Sandra Belloni*. The earlier portion of *Vittoria* was written, amid the happy associations of his engagement and second marriage, in The Old House at Mickleham, in the summer of 1864. Here he wrote his rough script, and his future wife copied out the chapters as they were completed. Then came the interval when *Rhoda Fleming* was completed ; but later in 1865 the author attacked *Vittoria* with renewed vigour. He felt he had a genius for treating an epical subject, and wished to get out of the rut of a rather morbid dissection of human nature where his recent novels had placed him. He was encouraged to pursue his new path by G. H. Lewes and Frederick Sandys, who had heard read portions of the manuscript of *Vittoria*. *Vittoria* appeared first as a serial in *The Fortnightly Review*, during 1866, during the editorship of G. H. Lewes. The author received £250 for his serial rights.

Meredith also read most of the novel to Madame Venturi, the great friend of Mazzini, who pronounced the Italian descriptions good and accurate.

Meredith was much away during 1866. In the spring he paid a visit to Monckton Milnes, Lord Houghton, at Fryston Hall, in Yorkshire : this probably came about through the introduction of

THE OLD HOUSE, MICKLEHAM, THE HOME OF THE VULLIAMY FAMILY. MEREDITH COMMENCED "VITTORIA" HERE

Swinburne.[1] In June he proceeded to Italy to act as War Correspondent for *The Morning Post* during the campaign between that country and Austria. This expedition enabled him to obtain some additional and valuable local colour for *Vittoria* before it was republished in three-volume form by Chapman and Hall early in 1867; this reason and the financial benefit accruing induced Meredith to undertake the work, for he was not by inclination ever a journalist. In fact, he hated the methods of journalism, which were, of course, in absolute antithesis to his own natural style. Consequently his war articles were unnatural and cramped, and rather dull: he cannot be placed in the front rank of war correspondents. His reports of the war were mainly second-hand, as he did not see much of the actual fighting. But he accompanied the Italian army, driving and camping with the troops. Here he was more in his element, and his narratives, written in haste without time for art and elaboration, and therefore quite un-Meredithian, are not without some interest and value.[2] On 22nd June he was with Cialdini's army corps at Ferrara, and on the 30th at Cremona. By 3rd July he was at Bozzolo,

[1] Lord Crewe informs me: "Mr George Meredith's signature in the Fryston Visitors' Book is dated 5th April, 1866. Among the guests a few days earlier appear: T. Carlyle (28th March); T. H. Huxley (29th March); and Henry Reeve (2nd April); but it is not likely that any of these stayed on during his visit. The following were no doubt his fellow-guests: A. C. Swinburne (5th April); Samuel and Florence Baker (4th April); the Bishop of St David's (6th April—Thirlwall); Dr and Mrs Vaughan (6th April—then Vicar of Doncaster); J. H. Bridges (7th April—the positivist philosopher); Henry J. Selwin (7th April—afterwards Sir H. Selwin Ibbetson). I do not think my father ever saw much of Mr Meredith, though he admired his work, in poetry especially."

[2] Meredith's *Correspondence from the Seat of War in Italy* is reprinted in the Memorial Edition and Edition de Luxe of his works.

the headquarters of the eleventh division of the Italian army, and on the 7th at Torre Malimberti. Finally he accompanied the troops to the new headquarters at Piadena, and thence to Gonzaga, where he saw a good deal of camp life. Proceeding to Treviso and Venice, he left Italy, reaching Marseilles on 24th July. He returned to Austria and Italy in August, and by 10th September reached the Hotel Cavour, Milan, after staying in Venice, Padua, and Vicenza. At the Hôtel Cavour, Meredith was with his friend H. M. Hyndman, and they used to sit outside the Café Florian engrossed in conversation until the early morning. Hyndman was acting as War Correspondent for *The Pall Mall Gazette*, and also of their party, later, at the Hôtel Vittoria, Venice, were George Henty of *The Standard*, and George Augustus Sala of *The Daily Telegraph*. It was here that Meredith and Sala had a tremendous quarrel. Sala did not appreciate Meredith's manner and clever, artificial talk, which was probably above his head. From being on the defensive he assumed the offensive, accused the other of parsimony in the matter of hospitality, and finally insulted Meredith in a very gross manner. The latter, very wisely, rose and left the table; in an actual physical struggle he could have demolished the weakly Sala in an instant, so his forbearance was great. At Vienna, by chance, Meredith first met Leslie Stephen, who in later years was to become his very dear friend.

Christmas, 1866, again found Meredith at The Old House, Mickleham, and the new year witnessed the publication of *Vittoria*, enlarged and improved by much observation and knowledge acquired during the author's recent visit to Italy. Unfortunately *Vittoria* was not warmly received by the majority

of English critics and readers. *The Spectator*, whilst admitting the merits of the book, took care to say that the author suffered from "literary egotism," and that his "style often *gasps* with effort"—this, no doubt, in fond memory of the controversy about *Modern Love*. The fairest notice was in *The Pall Mall Gazette*. Meredith was keenly sensitive to what he considered the dense misapprehension of his contemporaries, and in 1883, many years after the first appearance of *Vittoria*, he told a correspondent who desired a copy of this book how the effect of public disfavour had been to make him indifferent to his works after they had gone through their course of castigation.

But be it always remembered that *Vittoria* did receive the immediate appreciation of at least one great contemporary and friend—Swinburne, whose *Song of Italy* (1867) was then finding voice from the same inspirational cause that generated the novel. Swinburne, of course, was passionately enthusiastic for the cause of Italian freedom; when at Balliol he had a portrait of Mazzini hanging in the place of honour in his room, and before this picture he would declaim verses, with gestures of adoring supplication; and at this period he wrote an *Ode to Mazzini*, which was found in manuscript after his death. He therefore warmly appreciated Meredith's eulogy of his hero's cause and that wonderful description of Mazzini's personal appearance—particularly the eyes—when, at the outset of the story, the patriot is seen standing on the heights amid the hanging forests and pointed crags; and the gleam of the distant rose-shadowed snows.

In reply to his friend's praise, Meredith wrote from Kingston Lodge to say how much he valued

Swinburne's good opinion, the possession of which was as good as success. But publicly he felt *Vittoria* was a failure, and his publishers informed him the work was disliked. He feared he would have to abandon novel writing and rely on journalism. He hoped that Swinburne would be able to contribute a review on his work in general to *The Fortnightly Review*. As regarded *Vittoria*, he said his intention had been to present the Italian revolt with all its native passion rather than an epic on the subject, but he feared, after all, the style of his picture was stiff.

Meredith was here, for once, a correct critic of his own work. The style of *Vittoria* may be stiff, but it does indeed reanimate the Italian revolt and present that event not only as an historical picture (somewhat incomplete and episodical certainly), but far more as a pulsating momentary drama of passion and blood. *Vittoria* is not so much a novel of intense characterisation as of incident, thereby differing from the majority of Meredithian studies. Apart from the heroine, Barto Rizzo, and Pericles, the characters are not deeply etched: rather are they suggestive types of their respective nations or provinces. The Italians of Meredith utter ringing phrases: inspiring words for Italy, as fitting for to-day and the future as when they were penned in the glorious times of Mazzini and Garibaldi.

Vittoria herself—the consummated Emilia who has realised her personality and her ideal—is one of Meredith's most characteristic and living creations, on whom he lavished infinite pains. A very woman, contradictory, and thus essentially feminine, she is compact of patriot, musical artiste, passionate lover, and also coquette—as witness her relations with Wilfrid, her former lover, *en route* to Rivoli,

and her meditations on Count Karl and his Austrian and enemy attire.

But in recalling *Vittoria* it is always the incidents and not the characters which stand out in high relief from the glorious Italian scenic background. Meredith never painted finer pictures than here. The rather tortuous narrative and harsh dialogues may be forgotten, but never those vivid scenes suddenly thrown upon the imagination with all the quivering movement, living momentariness, and realistic fidelity of the kinematograph. The comparison is not altogether an apt one, but it can stand to convey the impression of restless movement and excitement and drama that pulsate in the scene at La Scala on the eve of the Revolt; in the subsequent flight of Vittoria and her night wanderings with Angelo on the hills of the Austrian border; in the duel in the pass; in Wilfrid's escape from the dungeon-house of Barto Rizzo; in the rioting at Milan; in the vengeance of the Guidascarpi on the betrayer of their sister (worthy of Balzac this); in Carlo's death. These, and many similar pictured episodes, are in the front rank of historical romance and bring Meredith into line with Scott and Dumas, though he gets his effects by a different method. And the same with the wonderful pictures of scenery in this story. Without the long detailed descriptions of the earlier school of romancers, the scene is conveyed by a few bold impressionist strokes. The first paragraph of the book, visualising the landscape from the Motterone, is a blaze of colour. Even the mystery of a dark night is a visible picture. *Vittoria* ends finely, and that passage where she regarded her dead husband as one who lay upon another shore expresses the same thought

to be found in Roden Noel's beautiful little poem, *Dying* :

> They are waiting on the shore
> For the bark to take them home ;
> They will toil and grieve no more ;
> The hour for release hath come.
> . . . . .
> Now the shadowy bark is come,
> And the weary may go home.

Vittoria, as we have seen, was the link which drew Meredith and Swinburne together again for a time, with the result that Swinburne came to stay for a few days at Kingston Lodge. That was in March, 1867, and Swinburne's visit to Kingston Lodge is the last incident of any importance connected with Meredith's life there. He was now anxious to leave, owing to his privacy being invaded by the incoming tide of bricks and mortar engineered by that *bête noire* of authors and artists—the speculative builder. He was worried, too, by the notes of a neighbouring church organ, concerning which he once wrote amusingly to William Hardman.

Meredith succeeded in disposing of the remainder of his lease of Kingston Lodge to Mr and Mrs Frederick Jones, who were to become his very valued friends. Mrs Jones's first sight of him, when she went to see over the house, was amid the branches of an apple-tree, where he was gathering the fruit, and from whence he made her a profound bow nearly at the expense of Meredithian equilibrium. Meredith now took Flint Cottage, Box Hill, and his furniture was removed to his new house at the close of 1867, but Christmas he spent with his family, as usual, at The Old House, Mickleham, where he remained for most of January until all was ready at Box Hill. During the last months of 1867 he acted as editor

of *The Fortnightly Review*, during the absence in America of John Morley, and Meredith's poems *To J. M.* and *Lines to a Friend Visiting America*, which appeared within its pages, relate to this matter.

Meredith's poem, *Phaétôn*, had appeared in *The Fortnightly Review* for September of this year; and during 1867-1869 he also contributed some lengthy criticisms of new books to this Review, among the works he noticed being the *Poems* of Robert Lytton, *The Reminiscences of a Septuagenarian*, by Countess Brownlow, and Frederic Myers's poem, *St Paul.*

As Meredith's temporary editorship of *The Fortnightly Review* marks his most noticeable position as a journalist, this will now be a convenient time to relate briefly such facts as are known of that phase of his life.

CHAPTER IX

MEREDITH AS A JOURNALIST AND PUBLISHER'S READER. THE PINNOCK CASE

APART from his early contributions to *Chambers's Journal* and *Household Words*, and later to *Once a Week*, Meredith did not become a professional journalist until he was thirty-two; it was in 1860 that he joined the staff of *The Ipswich Journal*, and his work for the paper continued for more than eight years at a salary, it is reported, of £200 a year. *The Ipswich Journal*, for one hundred and seventy years the leading paper in East Anglia, was founded in 1720. It was acquired by the Jackson family in 1739, and, passing through several generations, it was eventually owned and edited by Stephen Jackson, who died in 1855. His widow (formerly Miss Catharine Cobbold) married, in 1858, Thomas Eyre Foakes, a barrister of the Inner Temple. Foakes thus became possessed of the then valuable property of *The Ipswich Journal*, which he was supposed to conduct, but in reality he delegated his duties to others. He was a friend of R. S. Charnock, and it was probably through the latter that he became acquainted with Meredith. Later they were neighbours in Surrey; Foakes was on and off with his mother at Walton at the time Meredith lived at Lower Halliford; and when the Foakeses took a house on Weybridge Heath, Meredith often came over to see them from Esher. Arthur Meredith was a playmate of Mrs Foakes's

son (by her first husband), now the Rev. F. J. Foakes Jackson, of Jesus College, Cambridge, the distinguished historian.

It thus came about that Meredith obtained regular employment on *The Ipswich Journal*: he was never editor of the paper, as has been stated at times: he could hardly have edited from a cottage in Surrey a journal published in Suffolk. The actual editor was Henry Knights. Meredith contributed every week leading articles and a column summarising the week's news in London and abroad. Every Thursday, too, he went up to Foakes's office, transacted business matters with the London agent of the paper, and completed his "copy" there, at 1 New Square, Lincoln's Inn. Some of his letters to friends are amusingly addressed and dated from "Foakes's Den," on "Foakes's Day"; and occasionally, when he was going away on holiday, his articles were written for him by one of his intimate companions. Thus he requested Hardman in August, 1862, from Ryde, to write for *The Ipswich Journal* a summary of the week's news, and an article on America, as a topical subject.

It is not possible, of course, to trace and identify for certain many of Meredith's contributions to the Suffolk paper. Mr Frederick Dolman went to some pains to examine the files, and printed some extracts which seem to bear the impress of Meredith's hand.[1] This was, presumably, the gentleman alluded to by Meredith, in a remark he made to Mr Clodd, as a ghoul who had threatened to make search for these articles; "may the Commination Service be thundered in his ears!"

The most interesting feature of Meredith's articles

[1] *George Meredith as a Journalist. The New Review*, March, 1893.

for *The Ipswich Journal*, a strong Conservative paper, was the facile manner in which he, a lifelong Radical of advanced views, advocated Tory principles. It would be amusing if one could establish for certain that he wrote the article attacking Gladstone for ceding the Ionian Islands to Greece, which article caused a great fluttering and outcry in the Radical dovecotes of Ipswich in 1862. It seems certain, however, that Meredith, Champion of Liberty, perverted his principles most egregiously for journalistic requirements or salary by supporting the cause of the South and the Slave Owners, during the American Civil War, in the articles attributed to him in *The Ipswich Journal*. Thus :

" Alas ! with a President who cannot write grammar, and generals who lie to the public and snarl among themselves, and who all turn tail to the foe, what can the North do but be abject and ask for a master."

And alluding to John Bright's support of the North, it is written :

" Mr Bright, *par exemple*, spoke at the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce on Tuesday. His speech contained the necessary ' vindication ' of the North. Their blockade is perfect, wonderful, their greatness should inspire fear, and so forth. We dub him Yankee and bid him good-bye."

A curious article also attributed to Meredith was that in which he drew a not very obvious analogy between George III. and Alexandra, then the youthful Princess of Wales :

"George III. would have been the most unpopular Sovereign that ever sat on the throne if he had not dined at one o'clock, had a siesta afterwards, and gone to bed at ten. He was constantly doing things which the nation did not like, and the greater part of his reign was dark with all sorts of disasters. But people forgave him because he conformed to the rules of ordinary life and showed himself, at least at dinner time, to be as other men are. Not the least effective source of the astounding popularity of the Princess of Wales is something of the same kind. She is very comely and graceful, and has the intrinsic attractiveness of youth, and these make her loved. But above and beyond these things are all the stories which reach the popular ear of her thorough geniality, her enjoyment of spectacle and gaiety, and the interest taken by her in everything which interests other people. . . .

"Our ladies wish, they tell us, and we can more decidedly say that every man living who is not a milliner in spirit devoutly desires, that the Princess Alexandra will relieve them from servitude to the Crinoline Empress. The introduction of the crinoline has been in its effects morally worse than a *coup d'état*. It has sacrificed more lives; it has utterly destroyed more tempers; it has put an immense division between the sexes. It has obscured us, smothered us, stabbed us."

Finally, the following extract, relating to the rumour that Lord Palmerston was to figure as co-respondent in a divorce suit, is distinctly Meredithian in phrase:

"But rumour is a wicked old woman. Cannot

something be done to stop her tongue? Surely one who is an octogenarian might be spared? We are a moral people, and it does not become us to have our Premier, agile though he be, bandied about derisively like a feathered shuttlecock on the reckless battledore of scandal. . . . We are indeed warned that nothing less than an injured husband has threatened and does really intend to lay an axe to the root of our Premier's extraordinary success, in a certain awful court. We trust that rumour again lies, but that she is allowed to speak at all, and that men believe her and largely propagate her breathings, is a terrible comment on the sublime art of toasting the ladies as prosecuted by aged juveniles in office. It is a retribution worthy of Greek tragedy. We are determined to believe nothing before it is proved. It is better to belong to the laughed-at minority who decline to admit that the virtue has gone out of our Premier than to confirm a shameful scandal, the flourishing existence of which is sufficient for our moral."

It is curious that the other paper, *The Morning Post*, for which Meredith wrote a good deal, should also have been of Conservative views. He seems to have commenced his work for this journal in 1862. As we have seen, Meredith went to the seat of war in Italy, in 1866, as the special correspondent of this paper, and his articles were not particularly noteworthy. He had no military knowledge and no sympathy with a soldier's outlook and temperament. Therefore he could not get to the heart of things, and his war articles were merely narratives of what he saw with his eyes or heard by report. After he left the Italian army he seems to have

realised that he was wasting his time as a correspondent. He hoped to be employed by *The Times* abroad, but that project came to nothing. Two years later, 1868, he was working regularly for another important newspaper, *The Pall Mall Gazette*.

As I have said, Meredith took up journalism merely as a means of making money, and to that extent it served his purpose for the years 1860-1868. But his heart was never in the work, and his results were commonplace and mechanical. His attitude to journalism, and its payment *pro tanto* a column, is aptly expressed in chapter vii. of *The Tragic Comedians*.

Meredith secured the position of publisher's reader of manuscripts as a means of making money also in the first place, and indeed it was the staple source of his income for thirty-five years. But he liked this employment much better than journalism ; he was very painstaking and thorough with the work, as will be seen, though his judgments in literary and business matters were sometimes wrong, which was only to be expected when so original a stylist and so highly strung a temperament essayed the rôle of critic and censor.

It was in 1860 that Meredith succeeded John Forster as literary adviser to the firm of Chapman and Hall, who had published his *Shaving of Shagpat* and *Richard Feverel*. In the early years of his engagement he entered his opinion of the manuscripts he had read—and they comprised nearly all those sent to the publishers—in an official book, which is, of course, carefully preserved. Mr B. W. Matz quoted many extracts from this volume in the interesting article, *George Meredith as Publisher's*

Reader, which appeared in *The Fortnightly Review* in 1910. It is possible, therefore, to recover some of the judgments Meredith passed upon the early work and unformed style of writers who have since become famous, and piquant comments upon both those who attained success and those who did not. The first recorded manuscript he read, in August, 1860, was *The Two Damsels: a Spanish Tale*, by C. M. O'Hara, which he dismissed as "Childish: return without comment." Next, Blanchard Jerrold's *The Fleet that brought the Pudding Home* was described as "poor, genial stuff"; and Whyte Melville's *Market Harborough* as "of the order of *Soapy Sponge's Sporting Tour*."

In the following year he performed his famous *faux pas* of the reiterated rejection of *East Lynne*. The story had first appeared as a serial in *The New Monthly Magazine*, 1860-1861, then owned and edited by Harrison Ainsworth, who, as a personal friend of Mrs Henry Wood, did his best to further publication of the work in book form, for he fully perceived the future prospects of popular success in *East Lynne* and its author. He called twice upon Chapman and Hall to urge the advisability of their accepting the manuscript, but "Opinion emphatically against it" was the report of their Reader, George Meredith. Ainsworth pressed the Chapmans to look over the story personally. They did so, and then took the unusual course of returning the book to the Reader for renewed consideration. But Meredith, whose supercilious didactics must ever be emulously envied by the scholastic profession, coolly ignored his employers' wishes, and, being perfectly independent and unmoved by introductions and recommendations of any work, again rejected *East*

Lynne, thereby entailing the loss of a vast sum of money to Chapman and Hall. After refusal by Smith and Elder the work was acquired by Richard Bentley, and proved to be one of his most profitable speculations. Since that time considerably over a million copies have been sold. As Ainsworth said to Mrs Henry Wood on one occasion: "Chapman and Hall have never ceased to repent . . . they publish a work that has no chance of success . . . and when such a book as *East Lynne* is brought under their notice they pass it over. I was never more amazed than when Frederic Chapman told me they had returned it to you." Curiously enough, *East Lynne* was started on its triumphant career of success by the review in *The Times* (25th January, 1862) written by Samuel Lucas, the editor of *Once a Week*. Meredith was very indignant at his friend's apostasy from his views, and wrote to the recalcitrant reviewer charging him with encouraging foul taste, and asserting that the incidents of *East Lynne* were all artificial and not sprung from the characters of the tale.

This was certainly severe criticism, particularly as some of its strictures might well have been applied to the novel, *Rhoda Fleming*, that the writer was then evolving. But Meredith never would admit any merit in Mrs Henry Wood's books. He apparently disliked a certain type of rather sensational novels by women, for this same year, 1862, both *Villiers*, by Ouida, and *Isola*, by Mrs Lynn Linton, were disdainfully marked "Decline" without any reason being given. His disapproval of Mrs Lynn Linton's views continued to the end, and as late as 1894 he wrote of one of her manuscripts: "Very sour in tendency, hard in style. All forced, and

exemplify the author's abhorrence of the emancipation of young females from their ancient rules. She has been doing this sort of thing in all directions." [1]

On the other hand, he was always ready to appreciate the unpretentious and conscientious work of young women of literary ability. He would give them much good advice, and though he might not accept the manuscript under consideration, by pointing out its faults he encouraged them to try again and achieve better things. A case in point is that of Miss Jennett Humphreys. Meredith wrote to her from 193 Piccadilly, the office of Chapman and Hall, in 1864-1866, three letters full of patient, but rather prosy, criticism and sound advice. At this date Meredith had adopted the plan of sometimes giving a personal interview to the authors, whose work he was considering, and verbally express his opinions and criticisms. It thus came about that Meredith offered to give Miss Humphreys a personal interview after she had sent in another manuscript, which got mislaid. The lady, accepting the invitation for a verbal chastening, replied: "She needs no persuading to convince her of the value, as well as the exceptional favour, of freely-spoken criticism. Her appreciation of it may be measured by the fact of her agreeing to throw aside her own cloak and receive a face-to-face castigation . . . , and she only hopes she shall have sense and ability enough to derive the benefit from the interview the Reader kindly intends." Miss Humphreys duly kept the appointment, and her account of the interview incidentally gives an interesting pen-portrait of

[1] Presumably he was annoyed in particular by Mrs Lynn Linton's *The Girl of the Period*.

GEORGE MEREDITH
ABOUT THE AGE OF THIRTY-FOUR

Meredith at the age of thirty-eight, just before he went out to Italy as War Correspondent :

" He was studiously polite to me ; and I have a memory of a man dressed with great care—leading even to lavender-coloured kid gloves—his hair of chestnut colour and lying in curls, or waves, round a handsome face.[1] What he said was patiently said, my faults being pointed out, and his judgment over what I had done being several times repeated—' It will not go to the public.' I asked if I might know to whom I was indebted, and he said : ' Excuse me ' —which, of course, I was bound to do. We had our talk in a small glass-walled office, enclosed off from the ground floor at 193, Piccadilly. I brought away my bundle of MSS. myself, in spite of Mr Meredith's polite desire that I would let him have it posted."

Not until over forty years later did Miss Humphreys learn the real identity of the Publisher's Reader. It is curious proof of how little known George Meredith was in his meridian to find another author of note apparently quite unaware of his existence and confounding his name with the literary pseudonym of the first Earl of Lytton. Writing to Miss Humphreys in 1871 (at the time *Harry Richmond* was appearing in *The Cornhill Magazine*), Harrison Ainsworth said : " I fancy the

[1] Curiously enough, the Rev. F. J. Foakes Jackson, who was only six years old at the time he saw Meredith, when the latter came to visit his stepfather, T. E. Foakes, of *The Ipswich Journal*, says he mainly recalls " the yellow dogskin gloves and the reddish whiskers of the novelist ; the odd thing is that I have any recollections at all, as I certainly was never given to understand that he was a famous man."

gentleman whom you saw at Chapman and Hall's must have been Mr Owen Meredith. I do not know him, but I have heard that he was their Reader." [1] Harrison Ainsworth's ignorance of the identity of Chapman and Hall's Reader was the more remarkable as this firm published nine of Ainsworth's original novels in the years 1861-1870, and the Chapmans were his personal friends. But, no doubt, Ainsworth's work was accepted without being submitted to the Reader. This is confirmed by the fact that Meredith informed me that he had only read Ainsworth's *Tower of London* and *Old St Paul's*, and was not acquainted with their author. It was strange they never met, because from 1871 until his death in 1882 Ainsworth lived principally at Reigate, and he shared Meredith's love of Surrey scenery, long walks, good cookery, and old wine. It was another odd coincidence that Mrs Henry Wood, Mrs Lynn Linton, and Ouida all commenced their literary careers in magazines edited by Ainsworth, and owed much to his help and advice ; and that the works of these three ladies should have been unfailingly disliked and rejected by Meredith when they were before his judgment-seat of Publisher's Adviser. Evidently the literary opinions of Meredith and Ainsworth were not in unison. The latter had been a publisher, and magazine owner, for many years, and he could exactly gauge what was likely to be popular and a financial success. Meredith was, in reality, not suited for his employment. Although his literary judgments may have been correct in a critical, academic sense, that was not

[1] Arthur Symons, writing in *Time*, 1885, thought a novel called *Mary Bertrand*, by "Francis Meredith," was the work of George Meredith.

what the publishers exactly wanted. He was not able to see what would sell well and be talked about, unless we assume in high alternative that he deliberately placed what he regarded as the pure interests of literature before the commercial ones of his employers. And yet no great writer ever learnt by bitterer personal experience than he what the public liked or disliked.

Meredith refused another subsequently famous book, *Erewhon*, by Samuel Butler, with the comment "Will not do." This was in 1871, and twenty-eight years later Butler commented: "This is not strange, for I should probably have condemned his *Diana of the Crossways*, or indeed any other of his books, had it been submitted to myself. No wonder if his work repels me that mine should repel him."

Meredith also rejected Wilfrid Scawen Blunt's first little volume of verse and prose obout 1867. The author in after years stated this judgment was "entirely right."

On the other hand, Meredith perceived the promise in the earliest work of William Black, then about twenty years of age, and wrote: "In its way very good. . . . The author's mind evinces strong sense and poetic perceptions; he has a remarkably clear style, and a power of giving soft pathetic touches, which I commend. He does not know much of life, nor has he the proper artistic feeling for the development of his characters in an interesting way. Write very encouragingly. Don't lose sight of him."

In this same year, 1861, he delivered another perceptive judgment on *Poems* by Edwin Arnold: "I should say this man will do something. . . . He

should wait till he has composed a poem likely to catch the public ear. There is no distinct original mark in these poems : not enough to rely on."

The most interesting event of Meredith's Readership was in connection with the commencement of the literary career of Thomas Hardy, who was subsequently, in the eyes of the world, to be his greatest rival ; though, of course, any comparison or rivalry between the two great writers was as absurd a suggestion as that which the previous generation had attempted to establish in the matter of the alleged competition between Dickens and Thackeray. Both pairs of men were distinctively original, and could stand alone as contemporaries of equal merit without any invidious comparisons. In December, 1868, Mr Hardy, then twenty-eight years of age, sent to Chapman and Hall a manuscript entitled *The Poor Man and the Lady*. Meredith, although he did not pass the story for acceptance, saw promise in it, and Hardy was invited, in the manner of Miss Humphreys, to come and see the Reader, which he did, and duly received much good advice : but the advice and sage precepts were not put into practice by Meredith himself in his own books. Mr Hardy has told me that he had his interview with Meredith in a back room at 193 Piccadilly, a house, now pulled down, which stood on the site of the Institute of Painters ; and that Meredith said a novel—or first novel—should have a " plot." Understanding from Meredith's further remarks that he meant what is, or was, called a " sensational " plot, Hardy proceeded to write *Desperate Remedies*—" a story quite foreign to my own instincts, and which therefore, oddly enough, owed its existence to Meredith." However, the work was not published by Chapman and Hall,

but by Tinsley, in 1871 ; and, unfortunately, *The Poor Man and the Lady* was never published at all. This first story of Hardy's is said to have been in marked satiric vein. Twenty-six years later, when both Hardy and Meredith were present at a meeting of the Omar Khayyâm Club at the Burford Bridge Hotel, in July, 1895, they made interesting reference to their early association. Hardy described his rejected first story as "Very wild," whereupon Meredith called out : "Promising." Hardy went on to say that if it had not been for the encouragement he then received from Meredith, he should never have devoted himself to literature, and that from the time of their first meeting he and Meredith had been friends.

Although not intimate friends, they had a warm regard for each other. Meredith said Hardy was one of the few men whose work he could read. Hardy visited Box Hill in June, 1905, when Meredith told Mr Gosse that he was always glad to see Hardy, because he liked him, and his twilight view of life. Two months before he died, Meredith wrote to Hardy on the publication of *The Dynasts* ; and when his friend lay dead Hardy penned that fine appreciation in verse, *George Meredith*, wherein he recalled their first meeting at 193 Piccadilly and their last at Box Hill :

> Forty years back, when much had place
> That since has perished out of mind,
> I heard that voice and saw that face.
>
> He spoke as one afoot will wind
> A morning horn ere men awake ;
> His note was trenchant, turning kind.
>
> He was of those whose wit can shake
> And riddle to the very core
> The counterfeits that Time will break.

Of late, when we two met once more,
The luminous countenance and rare
Shone just as forty years before.

So that, when now all tongues declare
His shape unseen by his green hill,
I scarce believe he sits not there.

No matter. Further and further still
Through the world's vaporous vitiate air
His words wing on—as live words will.

Another writer who had a personal interview with Meredith at the publishers' office was George Gissing, and he related how Meredith pointed out the faults and merits, and made suggestions for improvement, of his manuscript, which was published under the title of *The Unclassed* in 1884. This was Gissing's second book, and in his next work, *Isabel Clandon*, 1886, he received even greater help from Meredith, who examined the manuscript two or three times and caused it to be reduced considerably in length.

Olive Schreiner also had interviews with Meredith about *The Story of an African Farm*. On 2nd May, 1882, the manuscript had been marked: "Return to author for revision," and this being done, it was accepted on 10th August.

Contrariwise, he was not much struck by John Oliver Hobbes's first book, *Some Emotions and a Moral* (1891), which he judged: "Written with some power to exhibit the emotions of the sex—mainly in the form of whims." And concerning *The Heavenly Twins*, by Sarah Grand, he wrote:

"The author is a clever woman, and has ideas; for which reason she is hampered at present in the effort to be a novelist. Her characters have ideas, but they are not made to express them, and are

incapable of helping the story to move. Such story as there is pertains to their individual fortunes. There is no main current; Evadne would kill a better work with her heaviness. It matters little what she does—she has her ideas; the objection is the tedium in the presentation of her. The writer should be advised to put this MS. aside until she has got the art of driving a story. She has ability enough, and a glimpse of humour here and there promises well for the future—if only she will practise, without thought of publishing, until she can narrate, and sketch credible human creatures without harping on such traits as she gives them."

In 1889 he did not strongly advise the acceptance of the Letters of Jane Welsh and Thomas Carlyle. He said: "The authenticity will hardly be contested. But a proof of genuineness that rests so much on a capitulation of domestic trivialities is not a recommendation. . . . I much fear that a chorus of reviewers would cause the public to shun this collection.[1] The little in them concerning Carlyle would plead but poorly on their behalf. . . . I wish I could give a better report. My expectations were lively, and I am disappointed. But if you can just see your way to remuneration, I shall be glad."

Another notable rejection by Meredith was George Bernard Shaw's early work. The first, *Immaturity*, he curtly dismissed with "No." Mr Shaw has given me an interesting report of the matter, and his own views on Meredith, in these words:

"*Immaturity* was my first novel, written in 1879. It was refused by every publisher in London, as

[1] An example of how badly Meredith judged the public taste.

were its four successors; and, unlike them, it remains in MS. (if the mice have not eaten it) to this day. George Meredith shared the guilt of its refusal with John Morley, who read for Macmillan. I fear he repeated the crime with the other four—certainly with *Cashel Byron's Profession*. All my novels were refused everywhere. I have described the business in my preface to *The Irrational Knot* (the second of the five). For nine years I was rated as unprintable; and it was only in the case of this hopelessly old-fashioned and 'literary' *Immaturity* that there was any hesitation. The better I wrote the less chance I had.

"Once, when I had achieved the feat of speaking in the open air at Trafford Bridge (Manchester) for 4 hours at one stretch, a plot was laid by Henry Salt, Clement Shorter, and others, to take me down to Box Hill on the understanding that I should start talking the moment I entered the house and not let George Meredith get a word in edgeways. But it never came off; and I did not make the pilgrimage and the acquaintance until shortly before his death. I had thought of approaching him in 1898-9, when I lived on Hindhead, through Grant Allen; but I found that G. A. had given up going to Box Hill. . . . I valued Meredith as a poet and as a cosmopolitan *bel esprit* of a certain mid-Victorian type (represented by Dilke, Laurence Oliphant, Hyndman, etc.); but politically he was a Rip Van Winkle in the Socialist movement; and the literary life in the Surrey hills was contrary to all my rules of conduct: even as gifted a man as Meredith could not live it as long as he did without becoming a walking anachronism. *Diana of the Crossways* is fifty years behind *Our Mutual Friend*: its social

values were all out of date. That is why so many people who, like myself, have a very high opinion of his natural power, can read nothing of his except the poems and *Shagpat*.

"G. Bernard Shaw."

It is a pity that the project of a war of words, if ever seriously contemplated, between Meredith and Shaw was not brought to action. The Lord of Box Hill would certainly have been taken aback by a visitor who dominated the talk and who did not wait upon *his* words.

W. T. Stead also submitted his early literary attempts to Meredith, without much success. He related:

"I had the good fortune to know George Meredith for the last twenty-five years of his life. He was a true friend, not less faithful in criticism than he was cordial in his approbation. Of the former, I remember well the neat way in which he put me out of conceit with my first attempt to write a story. . . . I sent him my little effort with fear and trembling. My trepidation was not without warrant. 'I have read *From the Old World to the New*,' he wrote. 'Some of the characters are interesting and well drawn. One of them especially reminds me of Cecil Rhodes. But if any of your friends tell you that he likes the story as a story, *don't believe him*!' How delightfully Meredithian! Mr Meredith told me once that he had a novel on the stocks in which Lord Morley, Mr Fred Greenwood, and I were treated as types of our profession. It was to be called *The Journalist*. But it was probably never finished."[1]

[1] It has been stated that the manuscript of this work was burnt at the author's request, and in his presence, by Dr H. G. Plimmer.

As to the question of the desirability or the reverse of introducing living people and actual names into works of fiction, there is an amusing note in Chapman and Hall's book, 1861, relating to a manuscript entitled *George Meredith: a Tale of the Merchant Service*, whereof the Reader commanded: "Pray, speak to this man concerning the impropriety of taking living names as titles for works of fiction." This was certainly an ingenious complaint from an author who had pilloried his own relations and used their Christian names in *Evan Harrington* the year previously, and who, as we have seen, habitually drew his characters from his personal friends with but very transparent disguise. Meredith was the most inconsistent of men, and his adverse literary judgments on others were generally applicable to his own faults of style and construction.

I am reminded of a curious coincidence in names by the following note of William Hardman's in 1862:—

"Meredith insisted upon giving me a copy of *Over the Straits*, by Mrs Meredith—no relation of his whatever—but he gets all books published by Chapman and Hall for nothing, being in some way connected with that firm. This Mrs Louisa Meredith resides in Tasmania, and wrote to our friend asking if he was not her husband's long lost brother; she was with difficulty persuaded that this was not the case. Her letters were impassioned and full of entreaty; she and her husband were dying to take him into their arms. At last our friend favoured them with a sketch of his life and origin by way of explanation. This settled the doubts, and extin-

guished the hopes, of the Tasmanian Merediths, and the correspondence terminated with a hope that if they were not relations they might at least be friends. I should not say 'terminated,' for he still hears occasionally from Mrs Meredith."

This colonial Mrs Louisa Anne Meredith thus bore the same names as George Meredith's aunt, Louisa, who became Mrs Read and the original of the Countess de Saldar, and his grandmother, Anne Mitchell (Mrs Mel.). But more curious still is the fact that this Mrs Meredith, of Tasmania, dedicated another of her books, *Loved and Lost*, to her son, Owen Meredith. It is surely a strange coincidence that her son should have borne the name adopted by the second Lord Lytton—the person who was so often confused with George Meredith and even claimed by ridiculous rumour to be his half-brother.

The most eventful incident of Meredith's work as Publisher's Reader is also connected with family history. After the death of his wife, Catherine Meredith, my grandfather, Sir S. B. Ellis, married again, and by his second wife, Louisa Drayson (sister of General A. W. Drayson, R.A., also an author of note and a pioneer in spiritualism), had a son, the late Sir Alfred Burdon Ellis, K.C.B., Colonel of the West India Regiment, who died of fever during the Sofa Expedition in West Africa, in 1894. My uncle, in addition to his great military ability, had very considerable literary gifts, and wrote equally well both as historian and novelist. About thirty-eight years ago he sent some of his first works to Chapman and Hall, and the favourable reports of Meredith procured their publication. The Reader was apparently quite unaware that Colonel—or rather Major

—Ellis was a connection of his own, and a son of his "Major Strike," for since the days of *Evan Harrington* there had been no communication with the Ellis family; but he had the greatest admiration for Alfred Ellis's books. Meredith was always interested in works dealing with travel and foreign countries. Consequently he perceived the value of my uncle's detailed studies of the native races of West Africa, and the immense vocabularies Ellis compiled of the Ewe, Tshi, and Yoruba tongues. *The Land of Fetish*, 1883, was the first work he accepted. *The History of the First West India Regiment* he sent back to the author with suggestions, which were adopted before the book was published in 1885. *The History of the Gold Coast* Meredith said was written with A. B. Ellis's "plain but excellent pen. I should be of an opinion that it would be a standard history of the Gold Coast and our possessions about there. It is the one book on the subject." [1]

Later, my uncle wrote a series of short stories based on his experiences in Africa. *South African Sketches*, 1887, proved very successful, but *West African Stories*, 1890, brought trouble to author and Reader and publishers. In his original report of *West African Stories* Meredith seems to have perceived that his unknown "step-cousin" had followed his example and drawn some sketches too markedly from living characters, for he wrote: "Good, charged with local colour: not attractive to

[1] As lately as 1914, Sir Hugh Clifford, Governor of the Gold Coast Colony, approached me on the question of the republication of my uncle's books, *The Tshi-speaking People* and *The Ewe-speaking People*, at the cost of the Government of the Gold Coast. Sir Hugh Clifford said: "I should be glad to see these works made a text-book for all my administrative officers in the Colony and its Dependencies." So Meredith's judgment of the political value of these books is still justified.

Colonel Sir Alfred Burdon Ellis, K.C.B.

readers of romance, but curious, and the author's name as an authority with regard to those parts should help the book. If accepted, it must be with the stipulation that *Mrs Fitzgibbon* be omitted. It is a *sine qua non*." I have the holograph manuscripts of my uncle's works, and *Mrs Fitzgibbon* is the tragic story of an adventuress in Sierra Leone, which ends with the murder of one of her lovers by a jealous rival for the lady's favours. The tale was deleted from the collection, and it was unfortunate that Meredith did not also ask for the elimination of another character sketch, entitled *James Peacock*, the story of a West African trader who by sharp practices acquired a large fortune; for, on the publication of *West African Stories*, a retired West African trader named James Pinnock conceived this sketch to represent his own history (the alliteration in the names gave reason for this supposition), and he brought an action for libel against the publishers, Chapman and Hall.

The case was heard on 8th December, 1891, before Mr Justice Denman. Sir Charles Russell (afterwards Lord Chief Justice) was leading counsel for the plaintiff, and Mr Asquith, the late Premier, for the defendants. It transpired that Major Ellis had seen Pinnock in Brighton, and that their respective wives had some slight acquaintance; but when Ellis and Pinnock were travelling out on the same steamer to Africa, in 1888, it seems the Major did not appear to care for the plaintiff's company.

On behalf of the author it was urged that no personal description was intended, and that James Peacock's face was described as being of the pugilistic type, which could not be said of the plaintiff's. On the other hand, it was stated that a Mr Ditch-

field had related the facts of Pinnock's life to Ellis, who observed it was a marvel and that a good deal could be done with it to turn it into a good story.

The examination of Lieutenant-Colonel Ellis, taken on commission in Barbados, was then read. He said *James Peacock* was pure fiction, the ground plan of the story being made up of two stories current in West Africa. The first he heard at Quittah, in 1878; and the second at Bonny, in 1879. In order to work in both stories he had to bring his "hero" from Sierra Leone to Bonny—a place he knew and could give local colouring to. The name of James Peacock he had taken from an old Army List; all the other incidents in the story were imaginary. He acquired his knowledge of trading life in West Africa when he was District Commissioner and Collector of Customs at Quittah and Accra. His book was written in 1887, and, in September, Meredith, the Reader, suggested alterations. The revised proofs were sent back in January, 1888, but the work was not published until 1890.

George Meredith, when examined, said he had been Reader to the defendants for thirty years. Major Ellis's manuscript was submitted to him, and he reported on it on 27th September, 1887. He had never heard of plaintiff in his life. He had caused a story entitled *Mrs Fitzgibbon* to be cut out of Major Ellis's manuscript. As an expert he considered the story to be a work of pure fiction.

Cross-examined by Sir Charles Russell, it transpired he objected to *Mrs Fitzgibbon* as it was not in good taste. She was a female adventuress. The description of Peacock's mother he considered the attempt of a serious man to be humorous. He

objected personally to it, but it went down with the public, so he had to pass it. (*Laughter.*) It was a sort of elephantine humour. He did not like it, but one would have to object to so much. He was not aware at the time that the two incidents of the clerk and the engineer story were founded on fact. He thought the whole story was fiction. When pressed by Sir Charles Russell to say whether he had ever heard of Pinnock, Meredith replied: "Not since the days of my youth, when I learnt his catechism."

I asked Mr Asquith if he had any recollections of the case, and he replied: "I remember well my dear old friend George Meredith's appearance and demeanour in the witness-box. He had, I think, to stand the most severe ordeal that any witness could be exposed to: cross-examination by Sir Charles Russell, the greatest of advocates; and he came out well."

However, Mr James Pinnock won his action, and was awarded £200 damages. *The Times* devoted a leading article next day to the case, sententiously observing: "We are grateful to Mr Pinnock for putting limits to the right claimed by certain novelists to mash into literary pulp their friends, acquaintances, and the world in general"—which was a knowing or unconscious slash at Meredith himself. He, indeed, figured as the chief actor in the case. His evidence was parodied by, I understand, Rudolph Lehmann in *Punch* (19th December, 1891) in a skit called *By George!*—a most excellent simulation of Meredith's style. It was accompanied by a clever cartoon by E. J. Wheeler of "George-in-the-Box," showing Meredith popping up as a Jack-in-the-Box before the catechising counsel with Pinnock's manual in hand. In the same issue of

Punch was a skit entitled *Illegal Fictions*, also dealing with this matter.

Apparently no one engaged in the case was aware that George Meredith and Alfred Burdon Ellis were connected by family ties, involving the history of *Evan Harrington* and "Major Strike," and that it was a curious and unperceived link with the great novelist's early days.

MEREDITH IN THE BOX
By E. J. Wheeler, Punch, December 19th, 1891

MEREDITH DESTROYING LITERARY FORM
By E. T. Reed, Punch, July 28th, 1894

TWO CARICATURE SKETCHES FROM "PUNCH"
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CHAPTER X

BOX HILL. "THE ADVENTURES OF HARRY RICHMOND." MEREDITH AND GERMANY AND RUSSIA

MANY pens have described Meredith's house at Box Hill, and it may seem superfluous to attempt to picture once again the situation of Flint Cottage, which became his home at the close of 1867, and remained his loved and fitting retreat until the end, in 1909. It was a fortunate chance that found this ideal setting for the poet-novelist of Nature during his last forty years. The lovely surroundings of his home were reflected and interpreted again and again in the literary work of this long period; they inspired much that will never die: though he who dwelt there is now dust, the memory of him will attach to the spot evermore.

Flint Cottage, which is far more ancient than it looks, stands on one of the lower slopes of Box Hill against an immediate background of the woods of Juniper Hill and Mickleham. A white gate opens from the rough chalk road of the hill-side on to a garden plot of grass and flower-beds surrounded by tall yew hedges. A few steps under a trellis porch give access to a tiny hall with parlour and dining-room to right and left respectively. When Meredith first came to the house his bedroom was on the east side, overlooking the long sloping garden and a little wooded ravine, and from the window he could see the sun rise over Box Hill. After 1876, when his chalet was erected on the highest slope of the garden,

with a most picturesque woodland path behind it, he generally slept in the little room opening out of that wherein he lived and wrote in this ideal garden retreat. Around him sang the wild music of the winds he loved, and above floated the wondrous clouds that his favourite South-West brought.

In front of house and garden and chalet the long green slope of Box Hill sweeps up to the left in graceful lines to the tree-crowned summit. The view from the hill is very lovely, whether to the south-east over a vast tract of champaign country to the downs—" greyhounds in flight," as Meredith imaged them—and almost the sea of Sussex; or to west and north where rise, challenging the clouds, the hills and hanging woods of Ranmore and Denbies, Norbury Park, with its immemorial Druid's Grove of yews, and Mickleham Downs. The scene is always beautiful. In winter, when the woods are purple under an opal sky, or clothed in gleaming mantles of snow and frost. In spring, when all the trees are a shimmering green, and the lilacs and laburnums bloom in the nearer gardens. Glorious is the landscape in the full pride of summertide; but loveliest of all, perhaps, as I saw it last, when the woods put on their autumn robes of russet, red, and innumerable shades of dark green, and the clouds are broken at close of day by bars of blood-red fire as the sun sets behind the hills.

The tinted foliage Meredith compared to a dozen differently coloured torches held up in the woods. The torches still burn there at the fall of the year, though he who hymned the beauty of the scene has passed.

Such was Meredith's loved home. His first letter written from Box Hill, on 31st January, 1868, voices

FLINT COTTAGE, BOX HILL, MEREDITH'S HOME AFTER 1867. SIDE VIEW SHOWING MEREDITH'S BEDROOM TO RIGHT. HERE HE WROTE "HARRY RICHMOND" AND "BEAUCHAMP'S CAREER"

Photograph by Mr. Wood

the inspiration the spot was to bestow on him for the remainder of his life. Here he, at last, found a home in the real sense of the word; here he knew domestic happiness. His daughter, Marie Eveleen, was born at Flint Cottage in June, 1871, and she and her brother passed their childhood here. And here Meredith reached the maturity of his literary powers and produced his most profound and thoughtful work. As Mr J. A. Hammerton well expressed it: "The tide is making for his greatest period of joyous and successful literary labour. Visits abroad, long tramps among the downs of his own homeland, increase of friends, the fireside haven of afterwork, love and the glow of good health; all these now mark his days, and this period of tranquil delight is to continue for a good many years, and out of it shall come the ripest fruits of his genius."

Thus work and domesticity went happily hand in hand, but he did not forget the old days at Copsham.

In October, 1868, he had stayed at Holly Hill to help his friend Maxse, who was the Radical candidate in the Southampton election; and in the summer of 1869 Meredith went abroad with Lionel Robinson to see his son Arthur.

To 1870 belongs the exquisite *Dirge in Woods*. The similar, but more pregnant, poem, *In the Woods*, was written three years later.

When the spring of 1870 at Box Hill came round, Meredith remembered his visits to the nightingale-haunted Vale of Mickleham in former years with Bonaparte Wyse, and wrote off to that valued friend to come down and renew old memories.

In 1870, also, Mrs Meredith's father, Justin Vulliamy, died. This summer Meredith paid a visit to his friend Maxse and had some yachting.

Next he and his wife stayed with the Cotterills at Tongswood, and then took rooms at 21 Cavendish Place, Eastbourne.

During his first two years, or more, at Box Hill, Meredith was leisurely finishing *The Adventures of Harry Richmond*, which commenced to appear serially in *The Cornhill Magazine*, September, 1870, illustrated by George du Maurier with unsatisfactory designs.[1] The story ran for the long period of fifteen months here, and was published in three volumes by Smith and Elder in the winter of 1871. But the work had been commenced as far back as 1863, and in May, 1864, the author told Jessopp, at the time he was writing *Vittoria*, that he also had in hand an autobiography, entitled *The Adventure of Richmond Roy and his Friend, Contrivance Jack: Being the History of Two Rising Men.* Apparently his first intention was to write a book on the lines of Borrow, dealing entirely with the road and the heath, for he mentioned a few weeks later some wayside pieces he was writing for *The Cornhill*, Sandys to illustrate them.

It is to be regretted that the project for Sandys's illustrations never materialised. He was a Norwich man, and could have given the Borrovian touch to scenes of nomadic life. And he evidently had some influence on Meredith's story, for it was a gipsy model of Sandys's named Kaomi who was the original of Kiomi in *Harry Richmond*. How fine was her presentation there is testified by Watts-Dunton, himself a profound student of Romany life:

"The pictures of gipsy life . . . in all other

[1] One of them, *Janet Ilchester with Harry and his Father*, was omitted in later editions.

novels are the merest daubs compared with the Kiomi of George Meredith's story *Harry Richmond*. Not even Borrow and Groome, with all their intimate knowledge of gipsy life, ever painted a more vigorous picture of the Romany chi than this. The original was well known in the art circles of London at one time, and was probably known to Meredith, but this does not in any way derogate from the splendour of the imaginative achievement of painting in a few touches a Romany girl who must, one would think, live for ever." [1]

Meredith's great romance of the open road and the wild heath lands of Hampshire had for setting that portion of the county adjoining Sussex, south of Petersfield. Riversley Grange was seven miles from "Ewling," which may be identified with Harting—the country, in fact, of *Evan Harrington* and Beckley Court. When little Harry Richmond was carried away from Riversley Grange by his imperial father, beyond the park ran a great high-road toward London, the Portsmouth Road. And in *Harry Richmond*, as in *Evan Harrington*, there are suggestions of Meredith's early life and family characteristics. *Harry Richmond* is, in my opinion, the "Autobiography" mentioned by the author in his letters, and which some of his commentators have stated was never written. But Meredith never asserted that the "Autobiography" was to be a plain actual account of his own life—a Book of memoirs in the Rousseau sense. On the contrary,

[1] *Harry Richmond* was regarded by Watts-Dunton as Meredith's best work, and he re-read it not long before his death. Kaomi was the model for Sandys's picture of Judith (1864), and another of his portraits of the girl was in the collection of the late Lord Battersea.

in 1864 he called it the "Autobiographic Tale"—that is to say, it is written in the first person like Dickens's *David Copperfield*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, and William De Morgan's *Joseph Vance* (bearing the sub-title "An ill-written Autobiography"). All these books reflect memories and experiences of their authors, and present transcriptions of actual characters known to them in the past: but they are not strictly autobiographies, for they all contain much that is purely imaginative. It is thus with *Harry Richmond* too. The word "Autobiography" applies to him and not to Meredith; but granting that, and the fact that some prominent characters, such as the Princess Ottilia and the life-like Squire Beltham, may be fictitious creations, it is also true that much of the book is founded on actuality. The Richmonds, father and son, are a sort of melange of four generations of Merediths. Undoubtedly the great Richmond Roy was inspired by Melchizedek Meredith in the first place. Was not the latter reputed to have passed as a Marquis at Bath, where Roy also strutted one of the many glorious hours of his life? But Meredith's stupendous creation of his Micawberian Prince of Adventurers and Impecunious Impostors far transcended the personality of his own grandfather, dashing, thriftless, handsome, and pretentious as the latter was. Meredith's characters were realities to him, and he would, it is said, hold communion and talk aloud with them in the retirement of his study where they were born. Thus he told Marcel Schwob: "When Harry Richmond's father first met me, when I heard him tell me in his pompous style about the son of a duke of blood royal and an actress of seven-

teen years of age, I perfectly roared with laughter!" The claims of Richmond Roy to royal birth were perhaps suggested to his creator by the absurd stories which, as we have seen, attributed to the novelist himself a similar lineage: or it may be the latter legends were caused by *Harry Richmond*, when somebody, reading the story, detected a reflection of some actual facts of Meredith history and imagined more. Richmond Roy also has some characteristics of Augustus Meredith, and Harry himself resembles both George Meredith and his son Arthur.

I have already pointed out that Meredith endowed Harry Richmond with his own gift as a boy of reading the thoughts and characters of his companions, and that Rippenger's school was a picture of the one George went to, in Hampshire, as a boarder after he left St Paul's, Southsea, in 1841. Harry Richmond's travels with his father on the Continent suggest those of Meredith and his small son Arthur, whose juvenile friendship with Miss Janet Duff Gordon resembled Harry Richmond's with Clara Goodwin. In this book, the living lady named Janet seems to have been used again as a model, this time for physical characteristics and not character; Meredith's description of Janet Ilchester certainly coincides with the Watts portrait of Miss Janet Duff Gordon. And both the Janets were skilled horsewomen.

The problem of *Harry Richmond* is the same as that of *Evan Harrington*—the love of a young man for a girl above him in social rank, and his (and his author's) conflict with snobbery and pride. The early part of *Harry Richmond* is certainly the best:

it is too spun out after the hero comes to man's estate. The boys of the book are delightful. But it is a pity that, having created his nice boys, Meredith sometimes makes them talk in his style and not that of boyhood. Boys who talk of our horses' hic-hæc-hocks getting strained on this hard nominative-plural-masculine of the article road, from conversation should be "expunged"—to use another unlikely expression emanating from a boy in this book. Meredith's good things come far better from the mouth of Richmond Roy.

The character of Janet Ilchester can be regarded as either a very subtle study or a failure. At the outset she is a scheming, unpleasant little girl, with a greed for other people's property: in the end a noble, generous woman, and it is not clearly marked in the story when and how her character changed. Up to the period when she successfully conspired to separate Ottilia and Harry in the Isle of Wight she ever appears unlovable and selfish, for her own obvious and paramount purpose was to secure the hero herself. A pale "hero" certainly, one who never accomplished anything except by aid of his father and friends; a squanderer of money provided by others; and inconceivably weak at the crisis of his fate. Why he should be debarred by high scruples of honour from marrying the Princess when she and her father were "in the net" of Richmond Roy is not apparent, in view of the fact that Harry had not hesitated to compromise Ottilia's reputation by a midnight assignation in Germany. It cannot be contended that in the meantime his character had advanced, for, despicable to the last, he accepts the bounty of Riversley (of which he had

been disinherited) and only discovers he "loves" Janet Ilchester when that astute young lady is the heiress of the millions he had reckoned upon in the past as his future inheritance. In the imbroglio of the renunciation of the Princess, sympathy goes most to Richmond Roy at the collapse of all his schemes; and his retributive fall, at the vengeful hands of the blackguardly Squire, is too heavy and complete for one who had ever before sailed his glittering bark of personality gaily over the seas of adversity. Meredith does not account for this sudden collapse of character either, and thus the final impression of the tale is disappointing and vague. This nebulosity of intention, which envelops much of the book throughout, explains the contradictory criticism it has received. Thus Arthur Symons found it a romance "rousing, enthralling, exciting, full of poetry, and a serious and masterly study in character. On a first reading we are fairly swept away and carried along by the racing tide of the narrative. . . . Brilliant and fantastically lighted pictures flit past, like the slides of a magic lantern." But W. L. Courtney pronounced: "Perhaps in no novel do we find the absence of joy more conspicuous than in *Harry Richmond*. Here is a young man who goes through a series of surprising adventures quite removed from the sphere of probability. . . . The only literary excuse for such extravagance would be the rollicking character of the hero, such a one, for instance, as was endeared to our childhood by Captain Marryat or Kingston. But Harry Richmond does not rollick: he is never young, but talks about himself with the *maladie de la pensée* of a modern age."

I think Mr Courtney is right, though some, no doubt, find the story rollicking, and have even regarded it as of the school of Lever, the Prince of Rollickers. Thus, Meredith told Hardman when the tale was first appearing in *The Cornhill* that a friend named Lethbridge had seen it attributed to Lever. There are some interesting references to *Harry Richmond* in two letters to Jessopp from Meredith (not included in the published Correspondence). He mentions that some of his friends pronounced it his best novel. But, as usual, with the general public the story was not much of a success, and by many was not even understood.

Maxse told Meredith that he knew a lady—a great novel reader—who found *Harry Richmond* quite unintelligible in parts. But the German scenes of the book ought to have appealed to the public of that time (1870-1871), for they were topical in view of the contemporary Franco-Prussian War. Meredith, however, is always topical, whatever the lapse of years since he wrote, and his revelations of German character in *Harry Richmond* could be cited as apt to-day as they were fifty years ago. The views of Prince Hermann and Professor von Karsteg have the ring of 1917.

The war of 1870 deeply affected Meredith, who was torn asunder by conflicting sympathies for both belligerents. France he ever loved, but he blamed the Emperor ; and he liked much that was German. At first he cherished the hope of seeing something of the conflict in his old rôle of war correspondent, but this did not come about.

By the autumn, Meredith attached more blame to France, and writing to his son Arthur, whose

sympathies were warmly for the French, he expressed the view that the French were responsible for the war, and that their Emperor was the villain of the piece. Two generations had been brought up on the principles of Napoleonism—in other words the modern German formula that Might or National Necessity is Right. The Germans, on the other hand, Meredith said, had led a continuous life of civic virtue, and he esteemed them highly for their excellent moral qualities. He mentioned that, among his friends, Maxse's sympathies were entirely for France; Cotter Morison was pro-German; whilst Morley and he himself endeavoured to preserve an impartial view.

Although Meredith at this time described the French as the most brutal invader of an enemy country through all the ages, he grieved for their losses and humiliation. Consequently he was able to write at this same time, in seeming contradiction of sympathies and views, his Ode, *France, December, 1870*, which appeared the following month in *The Fortnightly Review*.

But again, two months later, in February, 1871, he wrote to Maxse of France in phrases which were applied to Germany in 1918. In this letter Meredith did not advocate a British alliance with France, or intervention in that country's quarrels with Germany. But at the close of his life he foresaw that England would be involved in a war that would devastate all Europe. Speaking in 1909 to the Rev. D. Owen, a Welsh bard, he said he was by temperament an optimist. He believed in the future of the race, in the progress of mankind, and in the inviolability of the soul. But he was a pessimist on one point,

because he saw looming in the distance, not the very far distance, a great tragedy, the Armageddon of Europe. A generation of thunder and lightning: Europe a medley of blood and thunder. He would not live to see it; he was too old, not in spirit but in years. But, with all the talk of peace, the signs of the times were for war. Britain needed a great stirring up, a great crisis, to rehabilitate the qualities of the race. We had become limp, lax, and fearful. We were afraid of death. Militarism in Germany would produce a sort of barbaric courage, dead to all the higher instincts of man. War waged by a nation obsessed by militarism would be horrible and ruthless.

And in a letter to *The Daily Telegraph*, 17th February, 1903, on the subject of Pan-Germanism, he prognosticated that in the eventual war Germany would be beaten by internal troubles and the question of money.

Although Meredith was truly prophetic concerning the coming war, the effects of militarism on German character (once renowned for intellectual achievement), and the final course of events in the great struggle, he did not correctly judge the characteristics of his own countrymen and how they would behave when the trial came. The English did not require a German invasion of their shores to awaken them, and they have not proved afraid of death, either as soldiers in the field or civilians under murderous outrages at home. But Meredith was always too prone to write disparagingly of the English, especially in his letters. This trait seems to have originated from what he considered their lack of appreciation of his work; and so, to the end,

he would use contemptuous phrases concerning his country.

These references and others (particularly in *One of our Conquerors* and *Celt and Saxon*) to England and the English might be the growls of a dyspeptic foreigner.[1] It may be contended, of course, that Meredith wrote thus critically of the English in his assumed rôle of a pugnacious Welsh-Irishman constitutionally antagonistic to England. But despite his frequent assertion that he was Celtic, his Welsh and Irish descent, as previously demonstrated, was remote, his progenitors for several generations, on both the paternal and maternal side, having been Hampshire people. It must be conceded with regret that Meredith's strictures upon his fellow-countrymen were based upon a compound of personal pique and that very English characteristic—self-depreciation.

Fifteen years ago Meredith sympathised with Russia's aspirations for liberty, and desired the fall of the Tsardom. But that also he did not live to see. To an interviewer he said, in January, 1905, that Russia would not long escape the spirit of Liberalism that was sweeping over Europe. The British people should give practical assistance to the brave fellows who were fighting an uneven, an almost hopeless battle. They could not expect much help from Germany. Germany ever since 1870 had been an armed camp, waiting behind a fortress to be attacked. But no doubt the German people would sympathise with the poor Russians.

[1] It is true that in *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* Meredith gave expression to admiration for many characteristics of English schoolboys and their creed, and the dogged pluck of Englishmen as soldiers.

France was forced into an alliance with Russia by the Triple Alliance, before she had come to a good understanding with us. Her people were attracted by the undeveloped riches of Russia to invest their money in that country. France had her bondholders to consider. But the French people also would have much sympathy with the aims of the Russian revolutionaries.

At this same time he wrote his poem, *The Crisis*, voicing liberty for Russia.

It is curious that Meredith, a lifelong Radical and champion of liberty, and one who fully perceived the dangers of militarism, should have been in favour of the greatest evil of militarism—conscription. When the question of the Russian advance in Asia was prominent in 1878, Meredith wrote to Hardman, editor of *The Morning Post*, advocating conscription. In 1874 he had urged the same view on Frederick Greenwood for propagation in *The Pall Mall Gazette*; and in 1890 he wrote, in *One of our Conquerors*, to the same effect.

At the end of his life his views seem to have been modified to an approval of a system of military training. He wrote to H. M. Hyndman, in January, 1909, approving of his and Mr Blatchford's plea for a citizen army. Meredith contributed a poem on the subject, entitled *The Call*, to *The Oxford and Cambridge Review*.

In conclusion, it must be conceded that, on the whole, Meredith's outlook upon public affairs was remarkably sane and far-seeing, and that his words, when dealing with such subjects, are as appropriate to-day as when they were written in past years. Despite his pose of criticising the English, he

admitted they were a kind-hearted people; he sincerely loved his native country and would, however much he loved Germany, or France, or Italy, have supported her in any supreme crisis of her fate.

CHAPTER XI

"BEAUCHAMP'S CAREER." THE SHORT NOVELS. SOME LATER LITERARY FRIENDSHIPS

DURING the decade of the seventies, Meredith formed some additional and notable friendships, in particular with Leslie Stephen (whom he had first met in 1866), Comyns Carr, R. L. Stevenson, and Frederick Greenwood, the projector and first editor of *The Pall Mall Gazette*.

At this date he was contributing to *The Graphic* a series of Dialogues which appeared during December, 1872, and January, 1873, in five parts, and were entitled *Up to Midnight*. Seven characters discuss the topics of the day, the late Franco-Prussian War, and the political situation abroad and at home. Recent floods and their influence on crops introduce a typical little bit of scenic painting. This leads on to a discussion of the picturesque and poetry, when Mr M'Nimbus says he prefers good boots to bad poems. There follows a passage flavoured with the genuine Meredithian tang.

Since 1871 he had been engaged on the composition of *Beauchamp's Career*. In the spring of 1874, when the work was ready, it was not found acceptable as a successor to *Harry Richmond* in *The Cornhill Magazine*.[1] This was a disappointing omen for the story, and, perhaps, contributed more than

[1] *The Cornhill Magazine* had, however, published Meredith's rather obscure poem, *The Song of Theodolinda*, in September, 1872. For *Harry Richmond* Meredith received from *The Cornhill Magazine* £500, and a further £100 after the sale of 500 copies.

anything else to consolidate Meredith's disgust at the lack of appreciation he thought he received (it must be remembered that he was ever appreciated by a select few of his contemporaries) and his resultant criticism of the English which we considered in the last chapter. For he was now on the flood tide of his literary powers, and *Beauchamp's Career* merited an enthusiastic reception and immediate success. Here he gave of his very best—himself, and his creations were living realities to him. He had approached and carried out his task with the most intense seriousness—too serious, I suppose, for a "popular" novel. In a letter to Dr Jessopp, dated 8th April, 1873, he expressed his views on the subject very finely.

He judged only too correctly that it would not be generally popular. When the story was eventually accepted for *The Fortnightly Review*, on the condition of drastic condensation, he wrote to the editor, John Morley, concerning the parts to be cut out, and protested the "mutilation" would not affect him. But, of course, he did feel acutely the "mutilation" of his work, for to hack at a created thing is the most painful task that could be assigned to its author. He wrote rather sadly and despondently to Moncure D. Conway, who was negotiating for the American publication of *Beauchamp's Career*, in June, 1874, that it was not likely to be a popular book.

It is well known that the character of Beauchamp was drawn from the author's friend, Captain Frederick Maxse, R.N., whose emotional, mercurial temperament passed through many changing phases. It is an interesting study to compare and collate *Beauchamp's Career* with the extensive series of letters addressed by Meredith to the prototype of

his novel, for these letters analyse and advise on all those warring qualities exhibited by Beauchamp, some of them penned long before the book was written. *Beauchamp's Career* is a study of the combat in a man of his hereditary aristocratic instincts and passions with a sincere, if rather hysterical, realisation of the wrongs and needs of the democracy, with various personal feuds and fads as corollaries. So in the letters are politics (public and private) and fads—such as Maxse's abstention at one time from meat and strong drink—pregnantly or humorously dealt with, followed by many comments on the exemplar's character.

Although Meredith always spoke his criticisms plainly, only once was he on the point of rupture with his friend. The passing cloud soon blew over. Meredith fully realised his friend's fine points and shared many of his political views. He actively assisted in canvassing for Maxse, who was the unsuccessful Radical Candidate in the Election of 1868 for Southampton (the Bevisham of the novel). As the years went on, the Radical sailor became a Unionist and moderated many of his early views. His friendship with Meredith endured to the end, and when he died, in 1900, the author of *Beauchamp's Career* paid him a fine tribute in a letter to Maxse's sister, Mrs Duff.

Of course, Maxse must not be identified too literally with Beauchamp beyond his vivid crusading nature and his early political and social views; though Meredith had a disconcerting way of blending actual traits and facts and names with the entirely imaginary doings of his characters.[1] As we

[1] Comyns Carr has a suggestive comment to offer on this matter. He said, in *Some Eminent Victorians*: "Meredith could talk and walk after a fashion that I have known in no one else. Sometimes he would

FREDERICK MAXSE, R.N. THE ORIGINAL OF NEVIL IN "BEAUCHAMP'S CAREER"

From a contemporary photograph

have seen, this was brought to a fine art in *Evan Harrington*; and, as in the other novels, it is demonstrated to a slightly lesser degree in *Beauchamp's Career*. Putting aside the obvious facts of the Southampton Election and that Captain Maxse married a lady named Cecilia, daughter of Colonel Steel (Cecilia Halkett, in the story, being also the daughter of a Colonel[1]), let us particularly examine the case of Beauchamp's uncle, Everard Romfrey, that delightful old Whig, who was drawn, both as to physical and mental characteristics, from Captain Maxse's maternal uncle, Grantley Berkeley (a younger son of the 5th Earl of Berkeley). It will be remembered that Everard Romfrey thrashes Dr Shrapnel with "a gold-headed horsewhip." Just so—for similarly a lady's name was involved—did Grantley Berkeley act in the famous case of his assault on James Fraser for the libellous review which appeared in *Fraser's Magazine* of his, Berkeley's, novel, *Berkeley Castle*, dealing with his family history in a peculiar manner. Grantley Berkeley felled the offending publisher to the ground and beat him savagely with a heavy gold-headed

occupy the whole of our ramble in a purely inventive biography of some one of our common friends, passing in rather burlesque rhapsody from incident to incident of a purely hypothetical career, but always preserving, even in the most extravagant of his fancies, a proper relevancy to the character he was seeking to exhibit. On one occasion I remember he traced with inimitable humour, and with inexhaustible invention, a supposed disaster in love encountered by an amiable gentleman we both knew well; and as he rambled on with an eloquence that never halted, he became so in love with his theme that I think he himself was hardly conscious where the record of sober fact had ended and where the innocent mendacity of the novelist had begun."

[1] Miss Alice Brandreth (now Lady Butcher) claims to be the original, to some extent, of Cecilia Halkett, but only, it would seem, as regards her conventional training as an only child and her consequent mental outlook, which suggested the conduct of Cecilia.

hunting-whip. Less fortunate than Shrapnel, James Fraser eventually died from an illness brought on by the injuries he had received. Grantley Berkeley's brother, Craven, was present when the assault took place: Meredith mentions the name Craven twice in his account of the Romfrey family, and he accurately describes Berkeley Castle, in Gloucestershire.

Henry Murray detected in Dr Shrapnel a physical resemblance to Meredith himself, with the same obstinate tuft of grey hair bristling up over his forehead—"the tall old man whose extreme leanness made him appear of more than his actual height . . . the face of more than feminine delicacy with an almost angelic softness of expression." Meredith certainly told Maxse that he as well as his friend could be seen in this "mirror" of a book.[1] However this may be, there is no doubt that in Blackburn Tuckham we have an authentic and amusing picture of William Hardman. The very name at the outset establishes that. Hardman came from the Bury and Blackburn district of Lancashire, and was not "Tuck" the name bestowed by Meredith upon his friend at the very beginning of their delightful companionship? And then, sketched with a few deft touches, is presented the figure and ruddy complexion, the north-country energy and assurance of the man; his personal traits, his love of life and good living, and that hearty laughter which echoes through all the letters that Meredith addressed to Hardman.[2]

Beauchamp's Career was, perhaps, Meredith's favourite among his own works. He told Mr Clodd:

[1] Letter, Christmas, 1875.
[2] Chapter xxvi., *Beauchamp's Career*.

"Sometimes *Harry Richmond* is my favourite, but I am inclined to give the palm to *Beauchamp's Career*. There is a breezy, human interest about it, and the plot has a consistency and logical evolution which *Feverel* lacks. Then, a thing that weighs with me, the French critics liked it; they said that Renée is true to life."

Renée was very real to him. He said to Marcel Schwob: "Was she not a sweet girl? I think I am a little in love with her yet." That was twenty years after her creation.

There was no very remarkable outburst of contemporary appreciation to greet this work, written at the height of the author's power, when it was published in three volumes by Chapman and Hall at the close of 1875. It has been stated by one prominent critic that Meredith's reputation was not materially advanced by this story, "overlaid by political disquisition," with "its somewhat monotonous hero." I understand it was at this date that Mark Pattison warned his readers against opening a volume which bore on its cover the name of George Meredith. However, H. D. Traill praised Meredith in *The Nineteenth Century* of October, 1875; in later years *Beauchamp's Career* has been ably noticed by Arthur Symons and other literary men; and both Justin McCarthy and T. P. O'Connor have declared it to be their favourite Meredith novel. James Thomson's appreciation I will deal with presently.

Presumably the popular objection to *Beauchamp's Career* is that it is neither a tale of mystery nor a love story with a happy ending. Meredith no doubt foresaw that profound criticism, for in a passage in the book, where he says he envies those

happy tales of mystery, he goes on to state his own case of failure.[1]

Although Meredith is reported to have said to York Powell: "Thank God I have never written a word to please the public," it needs no argument to prove that even in *Beauchamp's Career* there are many good sayings to please the densest public.

Again this book also, forty-six years old though it be, is strangely topical and appropriate for recent events. The very first chapter, with its excellent allegory of the Spinster Panic aroused from her bed by letters to the papers and lulled again by "inspired" leading articles, was applicable to certain stages of the Great War by merely substituting Germans for French as the foes possibly invading these shores. The main thesis of the book, too, the author's mordant study of the ineffectual character —fine in its individual elements, but marred and stultified by waywardness, lack of balance, and the impossible ambitions of the visionary, as exemplified in the personality of Nevil Beauchamp—is a signpost of warning at this time of national stress, when clarity of reason and stability of character are essential (and alas! how lacking) in men of politics and government and public affairs in general.

There are lovely scenic descriptions in this book —the night on the Adriatic, and sunrise upon the Alps, near Venice; and those vivid, unforgettable scenes where Beauchamp joins Renée in Normandy, and they ride through valley and wood till they come upon the little river at Tourdestelle with its trembling poplars and rustic bridge and mill bright in the silver moonlight. That is the picture I

[1] Chapter xlviii.

always see when *Beauchamp's Career* is mentioned; and no doubt Meredith described an actual landscape which he had seen during his visit to his Vulliamy relatives in Normandy during 1872.

Some points open to criticism the story must plead—such as the failure of Beauchamp to mete out adequate punishment to his enemy, Cecil Baskelett; the seemingly impossible behaviour (though founded on fact) of Everard Romfrey, Colonel Halkett, and other "gentlemen," in permitting the private letter addressed to Beauchamp by Shrapnel to be read and ridiculed in public; and the author's annoying method of relating important incidents, like the flogging of Shrapnel and the death of Beauchamp, by the conversations of other characters instead of in detailed and direct narrative. But these minor objections are blotted out by the fineness of the literary work. Here, in this book, Meredith writes primarily *for* men and *of* women in an exquisite way. Singularly subtle is the creation of Renée's personality—half beneficent, half malign star when in conjunction with the exemplar's career. The problem of Beauchamp's relations with the four women who not so much influenced as intertwined his life is of absorbing interest; the tragedy of his loss of Cecilia Halkett—one of the most lovable characters in Meredith's great gallery of female portraiture—brings a sense of personal regret rarely experienced in the reading of fiction.

Futile was Beauchamp in his wooing—"too late"—of Cecilia, and futile in his death. Pathos and tragedy here in full measure. What a flash-light of genius illumines that last scene by Hamble river: the drowned Beauchamp and the muddy, snivelling urchin he died to save: "This is what

we have in exchange for Beauchamp." Poignant, splendid futility *in excelsis*.

But beyond all this, and the sense of Tragic Fate, and the graphic power of the literary artist who draws these pictures, there rises paramount a perception of Meredith's clear, sane outlook upon life, of the essential robustness of his views upon national affairs and man's duty to man. Surely *Beauchamp's Career* is the most successful accomplishment of the goal the author desired to reach; here he voiced his message with penetrating notes, not lost upon the wind of pretentious verbiage as was sometimes the fate of his winged words.

Before leaving *Beauchamp's Career* it is of interest to recall that the book brought Meredith into personal association with James Thomson ("B. V."), the remarkable poet of the sombre *City of Dreadful Night* and the sparkling *Sunday up the River*, whose wasted gift of life and talents so sadly resembled the case of E. A. Poe. Curiously enough, the same absurd legend which bestowed Bulwer Lytton as a parent upon Meredith was attached also to the paternity of Thomson, but probably all three men were unaware of the lying rumour which propounded this literary relationship.

James Thomson was the son of a sailor and born at Port Glasgow in 1834. His profession as an army schoolmaster brought him, when stationed at the dreary barrack-village of Ballincollig, near Cork, the friendship of Charles Bradlaugh, who in those early days was a trooper in a dragoon regiment.

Bradlaugh afterwards obtained various kinds of employment for his friend, and as editor of *The National Reformer* gave first publication to Thomson's poems during the years 1862-1874. It was in

1874 that *The City of Dreadful Night* appeared, and brought some meed of recognition to the poet. Thomson was one of the early admirers of Meredith's work, and *Beauchamp's Career* inspired him to contribute his able and characteristic *Note on George Meredith*, in 1876, to *The Secularist*. This was followed by an equally appreciative article in *Cope's Tobacco Plant*, in May, 1879. At the same time Meredith was reading with equal appreciation the poems of Thomson, whom he only knew as "B. V." Eventually the identity of the poet with the critic was revealed by G. W. Foote to Meredith.

There was much of Thomson's work in sympathy with Meredith's outlook upon life and his poetical expression of thought. Consequently the latter was able to give very high praise to his new friend's volume of verse in 1880. The two poets met only twice in life. In September, 1881, Thomson visited Flint Cottage and relates:

"Tuesday I spent with George Meredith at Box Hill; a quiet, pleasant day, cloudy but rainless, with some sunshine and blue sky in the afternoon. We had a fine stroll over Mickleham Downs, really park-like, with noble yew-trees and many a mountain-ash ('rowan' we Scots call it) glowing with thick clusters of red berries. M. read me an unpublished poem of considerable length. He says that having suspended work on a novel,[1] poems began to spring up in his mind, and I am glad that he thinks of bringing out a new collection."

Meredith endeavoured to help Thomson and further his literary prospects by introducing him to John Morley, the editor of important papers.

[1] *Diana of the Crossways.*

But it was too late; his efforts were in vain, like those of Thomson's other friends. The melancholy poet's intemperance was a form of madness engendered by morbid depression and despair of the most appalling kind. It was periodical in attack, and made him too weak and unfit to carry out any literary employment given to him. The last tragic months found him wholly in the power of his foe, and he died in University College Hospital on 3rd June, 1882, at the age of forty-seven. In subsequent letters to Thomson's biographer, Mr H. S. Salt, Meredith further expressed his appreciation of the unhappy poet. Meredith's association with James Thomson, and his unfailing sympathy with him, is one of the most charming episodes in the records of literary friendships.

Following the publication of *Beauchamp's Career*, Meredith did not produce very much during the next few years. He was writing some short stories and poems, and studying the idea of Comedy, which was to bear fruit in the Essay on the subject and in *The Egoist*. Life at Box Hill was very pleasant in these days. In the summer of 1874 he would rise at 5.30 A.M., and revel in the fresh morning air and lovely scenery, so solitary and virgin at that early hour. At this period, too, he would invite his friends to a late breakfast in the garden, in the French style, with Hock to drink.

Meredith had always loved choice food and good wine, as we have seen, but unfortunately he suffered from a weak stomach, which constrained him to try for a time the vegetarian regimen he had so stoutly warned Maxse against but a few years earlier. Mr Hyndman, in paying a tribute to the merits of Meredith's second wife, makes amusing allusion to

the vegetarian trial which the victim pursued with characteristic ardour.

"I have heard some of Meredith's friends speak rather slightingly of this lady, as if she were intellectually quite unworthy of her husband. Genius has no mate. But Mrs Meredith was a charming, clever, tactful and handsome Frenchwoman, a good musician, a pleasant conversationalist, a most considerate, attentive, and patient wife, and an excellent mother. Nobody who knew her could fail to admire, esteem, and like her. Her care of her husband was always thoughtful but never obtrusive, and Meredith, with all his high qualities, was not by any means an easy man to live with. Writing men mostly are not. At one time he would persist in turning vegetarian. It was well-nigh the death of him. But he had persuaded himself that that was the right sort of food to give the highest development to body and mind, and persist in it he would. What was to be done? Meredith was a man who took a tremendous lot out of himself, not only intellectually but physically. He was always throwing about clubs or going through gymnastic exercises or taking long walks at a great pace, not allowing an ounce of fat to accumulate on his body or his face. It was the same with his writing. He never pretended to take matters easily. So poor Mrs Meredith had a hard time during this bread and roots period. She saw her husband gradually going down hill, and becoming every day more gaunt and hungry-eyed and skeletonic; yet if she or anyone else ventured to suggest that this meagre diet was unsuited to a man of his habit of life and work, and that—this very gently—his increasing acerbity was

caused by sheer lack of sustenance and his energy consequently sawing into his exposed nerves—well, it was a case of ' stand from under ' very quickly."

Mrs Meredith endeavoured to remedy the situation by introducing shredded meat, with the connivance of the local baker, into the bread intended for her husband's consumption.

Although Meredith always appreciated good wine, his enthusiasm for rare vintages, which often sparkle in his works, seems to have been modified with advancing age, probably because he found that stimulants did not agree with him. But as late as 1891 he expatiated on the joys of Old Veuve and Burgundy in *One of our Conquerors*; and in 1908 he said: " I drink wine and I smoke."

During 1876 he wrote several poems for *The Fortnightly Review*, including his fine *Ballad of Past Meridian.*

In December, 1876, he received a visit from Bonaparte Wyse and R. H. Horne—his " deep-hearted friend " in early manhood.

Meredith had now completed his essay *On the Idea of Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit*, and he was induced to deliver it in the form of a lecture at the London Institution, Finsbury Circus, on 1st February, 1877, which was, I think, his first and last appearance as chief actor at a public function of this description. The lecture seems to have been quite a success. The Essay was soon after published in *The New Quarterly Magazine*, April, 1877. It is needless to recapitulate the argument of the Essay and Meredith's plea that an atmosphere of mental equality between the sexes is required before pure Comedy can truly flourish. One characteristically

comic portion is that relating to the national reaction from the dissolute Restoration comedies.

Meredith had contributed also to *The New Quarterly Magazine*, for January, 1877, his first short novel, *The House on the Beach*. This story, as I have previously related, was commenced as far back as 1861, under the title of *Van Diemen Smith*, and contained Meredith's impressions of Seaford. When he resumed the narrative fifteen years later he seems to have amplified the character of Martin Tinman with some particulars of a civic quidnunc, named Busby, at Kingston, whose doings were related to him by Hardman.

Meredith's second short novel, *The Case of General Ople and Lady Camper*, which followed in *The New Quarterly Magazine*, for July, 1877, was also based on an affair which had occurred in Kingston, when General Hopkins, a distinguished soldier, living at 1 Park Gate Villas, Queen's Road, Norbiton, was compelled to take action against his neighbour at No. 2, Lady Eleanor Cathcart, an eccentric person, who persisted in annoying him by sending caricatures of himself engaged in gardening and otherwise. Needless to say, the end of the case was not the matrimonial one of the story. Hardman was a friend of General Hopkins. Meredith transferred the scene of the tale to Norbiton Hall and Kingston Lodge, the houses previously occupied by Hardman and himself. In General Ople's "gentlemanly residence" there is a very accurate picture of Kingston Lodge, with its entrance lodge like "two sentry-boxes," its garden and privacy. And the opening description of how the General came to the place "across a famous common" (Wimbledon) and by "a lofty highway along the borders of a

park" (the Kingston Hill side of Richmond Park) is topographically correct.

Meredith's third, and best, short novel, *The Tale of Chloe*, appeared in *The New Quarterly Magazine*, July, 1879.[1] This little tale of Tunbridge Wells in the eighteenth century is one of the most perfect things he ever wrote. It is a masterpiece of construction and accomplishment, and makes one regret that he did not essay miniatures of this description again. Both the period of the story and the tragic end were unusual for Meredith, but he traverses both triumphantly. The characterisation is admirable. Beau Beamish is a kind of adaptation of the autocratic Nash translated from Bath, but Chloe is a brilliant creation. For her, Meredith must have "dug down to the very roots of human nature," as Sir J. M. Barrie said.[2]

Sir J. M. Barrie has ever been one of the staunchest Meredithians. His admiration dated from his early manhood, and the story of how he went down to Box Hill to try to get a glimpse of Meredith, and how he fled when the author appeared on the garden path, is true. I asked Sir J. M. Barrie if the legend followed facts, and he replied: "The first time I went down I sat on the bank gazing at what I was told was *the* window, and then he came to the door, and I drank my fill. Then he slowly came down the path and then I fled. If that's the story, it is 'gospel.'" That was about 1885, and he later became one of Meredith's most valued friends.

[1] The original manuscript was sold for £171 at Sotheby's in 1910. It was entitled *The Lamentable Tale of Chloe.*

[2] *The Lost Works of George Meredith*, by J. M. Barrie, in *The Scots Observer*, 24th November, 1888. His plea for the republication of Meredith's short novels has, of course, been carried out in several editions since then.

Another interesting friendship between Meredith and a young Scotsman destined for literary fame was that with Robert Louis Stevenson.

It was in 1878 that Stevenson and his mother came to pass the summer at the Burford Bridge Hotel. Through the introduction of Mrs J. E. H. Gordon he met Meredith, and would listen with rapt attention to the novelist's talk. Mrs Gordon relates (in *The Bookman*, January, 1895) :

" I well remember the eager listening face of the student Stevenson, and remember his frank avowal that from henceforth he should enrol himself ' a true-blue Meredith man.' He was an inspiring listener, and had the art of drawing out the best of Mr Meredith's brilliant powers of conversation. . . . My sister, I remember, was much interested in Stevenson, and even in those early days expected great things from him in the future. And I well remember her satisfaction one afternoon when . . . Mr Meredith trumpeted down our feeble utterances by informing us that some day he felt sure we should all be proud to have known him, and prophesied success and fame for him in the future."

To Mr W. M. Fullerton, Meredith said : " I knew Stevenson long before he was known to you all. I saw what was in him and knew that he would do good work."

It was Stevenson who was destined also to do " good work " of another kind in conjunction with W. E. Henley, Grant Allen, James Thomson, and others, and that was in compelling public recognition of Meredith's superlative literary work by means of forceful and enthusiastic criticism, raising his standard and proclaiming his title to fame. It is a

mistake, however, to think that these new champions introduced or "made" Meredith, or even "boomed" him—to quote the unpleasant phrase of one of them: they simply made him known to the wide outside public which takes its instruction from the Press and reads what its neighbour recommends. As we have seen, Meredith had always had the approval of a select band of cultured readers, even if the professional critics were adverse. And young Oxford had discovered him without any extraneous introductions. "My dear boy, we read Meredith in the early seventies at Oxford," York Powell said to Professor Oliver Elton; and a decade later, Mr F. T. Bettany relates: "We were all madly in love with George Meredith in my undergraduate days at Christ Church. . . . For us youngsters George Meredith was what Dickens had been to our seniors, and our joy in him was, I fear, just a little enhanced by his being—then, at least—caviare to the general."[1]

Oscar Wilde was at Oxford in the seventies, and it would be interesting to know if he was of the company who read and appreciated Meredith. Most probably he was, for it was only some ten years later (1889) that he wrote his famous criticism in *The Decay of Lying*:

"Ah! Meredith! Who can define him? His style is chaos illumined by flashes of lightning. As a writer he has mastered everything except language: as a novelist he can do everything, except tell a story: as an artist he is everything except articulate. Somebody in Shakespeare—Touchstone, I think—talks about a man who is always breaking

[1] Mr F. Schiller tells me that Meredith was also widely read by the undergraduates of Cambridge at this date.

his shins over his own wit, and it seems to me that this might serve as the basis for a criticism of Meredith's method. But whatever he is, he is not a realist. Or rather I would say that he is a child of realism who is not on speaking terms with his father. By deliberate choice he has made himself a romanticist. He has refused to bow the knee to Baal, and after all, even if the man's fine spirit did not revolt against the noisy assertions of realism, his style would be quite sufficient of itself to keep life at a respectful distance. By its means he has planted round his garden a hedge full of thorns, and red with wonderful roses."

And two years later, 1891, Wilde wrote in *The Soul of Man under Socialism*:

"One incomparable novelist we have now in England, Mr George Meredith. There are better artists in France, but France has no one whose view of life is so large, so varied, so imaginatively true. There are tellers of stories in Russia who have a more vivid sense of what pain in fiction may be. But to him belongs philosophy in fiction. His people not merely live, but they live in thought. One can see them from myriad points of view. They are suggestive. There is soul in them and around them. They are interpretative and symbolic. And he who made them, those wonderful quickly-moving figures, made them for his own pleasure, and has never asked the public what they wanted, has never cared to know what they wanted, has never allowed the public to dictate to him or influence him in any way, but has gone on intensifying his own personality, and producing his own individual work. At first none came to him. That did not matter.

Then the few came to him. That did not change him. The many have come now. He is still the same. He is an incomparable novelist."

This passage, I think, is one of the most acute observations ever penned on Meredith's art and his attitude to himself and the public. Unfortunately, Meredith was not able to offer any appreciation in return to the poet who had termed him "a prose Browning," and whose poetry was so often akin to his own in its passionate expression of beauty in Nature. On one occasion, in September, 1892, Meredith met Wilde. He was staying with the Walter Palmers at Reading for a couple of days, and another guest was "Oscar Wylde (*sic*), who is good company," he stated to a friend. The two authors were photographed together in a group. But Meredith was not favourably impressed by the paradoxical man himself, so Watts-Dunton told me, and apparently in view of the fact that he misspelled Wilde's name, he was not very familiar with the work of the author of *Dorian Gray*.[1] Otherwise his critical judgment should have given a guerdon of praise to *The Garden of Eros* and *The Burden of Itys*, poems which were inspired by the same spirit that had found expression in song in the older poet's *Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth*.

[1] Mr Frank Harris, in his *Contemporary Portraits* (1915), states that Meredith regarded Wilde as a *poseur* and by no means in the front rank of literature, and that he peremptorily refused to sign a memorial for the remission of some portion of Wilde's sentence in 1895.

CHAPTER XII

"THE EGOIST." "THE TRAGIC COMEDIANS"

IT was in the early spring of 1877 that the chalet in the garden of Flint Cottage was ready for occupation, and the first-fruits of this ideal work-place were *The Tale of Chloe*, and then *The Egoist*—the most brilliant of all Meredith's novels, wherein a spirit like that of champagne—or shall we say the tonic air of Ranmore and Box Hill?—bubbles and froths and scintillates in a prodigal outpouring of wit and epigram, comedy and mordacity. His surroundings were the scenic setting of *The Egoist*. "Patterne Hall" is not far from Denbies and Ranmore and Dorking ("Rendon"), and in this book Meredith gives his grandest picture of his beloved South-West in stormy mood and his own joy in his own Surrey hills.[1]

Commenced in 1877, and said to be on the way to a conclusion in June, 1878, *The Egoist* was in reality not completed until February, 1879. During the last three months of composition he wrote hastily and late into the night, with ill effects to his health. Apparently Meredith was a little doubtful of the effect the blinding brilliance of his cleverest work would have upon his friends, for he wrote dubiously to Stevenson on the subject. The work was published in three volumes, by Kegan, Paul and Co., in October, 1879,[2] and without the author's leave it made a serial

[1] Chapter xxvi.

[2] A second edition, in one volume, followed in 1880.

appearance under the title of *Sir Willoughby Patterne, the Egoist*, in *The Glasgow Weekly Herald*.

With the publication of *The Egoist* Meredith took possession of his kingdom. He could no longer complain of ignorant and unappreciative reviewers. There was a chorus of praise in the Press. Within a few days *The Spectator*, *The Examiner*, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, and *The Athenæum* all paid their tribute of warm appreciation.[1] The reviews in the two last-named papers were written by W. E. Henley, who also contributed the notice in *The Academy*—all three appearing in November, 1879. He and Stevenson were, of course, radiantly delighted that their perspicacity concerning Meredith's genius was at length justified and admitted. The two kept up their airy Badminton of praise of their idol, and particularly of *The Egoist*, until the end of life. It was in April, 1882, that Stevenson wrote that well-known letter:

"My dear Henley,—. . . Talking of Meredith, I have just re-read for the third or fourth time *The Egoist*. When I shall have read it the sixth or seventh, I begin to see I shall know about it. You will be astonished when you come to re-read it; I had no idea of the matter—human red matter—he has contrived to plug and pack into that strange and admirable book. Willoughby is, of course, a pure discovery; a complete set of nerves, not heretofore examined, and yet running all over the human body—a suit of nerves. Clara is the best girl I ever saw anywhere. Vernon is almost as

[1] As James Thomson put it in his Diary: "At length! Encouraging! A man of wonderful genius and a splendid writer may hope to obtain something like recognition after working hard for thirty years, dating from his majority!"

THE CHALET IN THE GARDEN OF FLINT COTTAGE. HERE "THE EGOIST," "DIANA OF THE CROSSWAYS," AND THE LATER BOOKS WERE WRITTEN

Photograph by Mr. Wood

good. The manner and faults of the book greatly justify themselves on further study. Only Mr Middleton does not hang together; and Ladies Busshe and Culmer *sont des monstruosités*. . . . I see more and more that Meredith is built for immortality. . . .

"I am, Yours loquaciously,

"R. L. S."

Certainly *The Egoist* must be immortal, for despite its cold glittering artificiality and intellectual and philosophical preciosity, the sheer cleverness of the book, its wealth of epigram, the riot of outrageous simile, the concatenation of antithesis and anti-peristasis, make it unique, a towering alpine peak in literature, crested with eternal gleaming snows. This is the most quotable of Meredith's books. Open it anywhere at random and an acute phrase will spring to light.

To revert to the history of the book. There was some question of dramatising the story for the stage as late as 1898. Forbes Robertson, who fancied the rôle of Sir Willoughby, commissioned Mr Sutro [1] to interview Meredith on the subject. The matter went so far as Mr Sutro taking the synopsis of the play to the author of the novel. But the project was abandoned later.

It is curious that the work has not appealed to actor-managers more, for it would make a superlative comedy of manners, and the part of Sir Willoughby could be made very picturesque in appearance, due attention being given to his "leg."

To pass to the prototypes of the novel. It is

[1] Alfred Sutro, subsequently to be well known as the author of *The Walls of Jericho* (1904) and other successful plays.

unnecessary to seek for an actual original of Sir Willoughby Patterne (although Meredith said he had a certain man in mind), for he is a universal type, a lay-figure from which everyone can study certain traits and qualities common to all humanity.[1] He is as accurately constructed from the original (up to a certain stage) as Tartuffe, and is, as Henley said, "a companion figure to Arnolphe and Alceste and Célimène . . . a compendium of the Personal in Man." There is the story, told by R. L. Stevenson, of how a young friend of Meredith's came to him in a rage and cried: "This is too bad of you, Willoughby is me!" "No, my dear fellow," replied the author of *The Egoist*, "he is all of us." To which Stevenson added the comment: "I am like the young friend of the anecdote—I think Willoughby an unmanly but a very serviceable exposure of myself."

We are all egoists, and consequently we can all see some aspects of ourselves in Willoughby Patterne; and all those who have loved—or desired—as he, where love—or desire—was not responsive, but only toleration or repulsion, can realise the pangs he suffered in his relations with Clara Middleton, whom at the same time he adored and yet longed to punish and wound in his baffled agony of mind.

This universality of Willoughby Patterne makes him a veritable mirror wherein poor humanity can see itself in the manner desiderated by Burns; but he is a figure of pathos rather than one of comedy. He is almost tragedy sometimes, as in the scene

[1] Mr Louis Wiikinson, in his lecture on Meredith, has suggested that the name Willoughby Patterne was intended as a pun on willow-pattern plate—a common type.

where he is foiled in obtaining possession of the letter Clara has left with her maid on the morning of her intended flight.

I see nothing comic in Willoughby, this unhappy man without a true friend, except his stilted phraseology, which is where he fails to resemble universality, and in the ridiculous final imbroglio, which is simply farcical and unworthy of Meredith. As we have seen, he finished the story hurriedly and with health affected. Unhappily, many of Meredith's novels go to pieces and improbabilities at the close, for he did not possess the craft of the real cohesive tale-teller, and in this case the art which had embellished the earlier part is smashed into as many fragments as Colonel De Craye's unlucky porcelain vase. The behaviour of Lady Busshe, Lady Culmer, and even Mrs Mountstuart Jenkinson is a preposterous perversion of the type they are supposed to represent; Clara Middleton's acquiescence —in view of her previously obstinate character—to Willoughby's arrangement to marry her off alternatively to Whitford is a hard strain on the probabilities; and Willoughby's final loss of all sense of dignity and decency in his desperate attempt to secure the faded and ailing Lætitia is in complete contradiction to the presentment, up till then, of his proud and sensitive nature. It may be charged to be a cynical reflection on the female sex, but in actual life a baronet, good-looking and generous, with fifty thousand a year, would not have to look far for a wife, and would not be reduced to implore, on his knees, a poor and plain and middle-aged spinster in ill-health, and a disappointed "poetess" to boot, to take pity on his unmarried situation and thereby save his face in the eyes of the world. As a work of

art *The Egoist* should have ended with Willoughby's loss of Clara Middleton, and he left alone with the dead sea fruit of his reflections. Meredith, speaking perhaps from experiences of his own first marriage, thought to condemn him to an even bitterer retribution: a woman with intellect for a wife.

What all the commentators of *The Egoist* seem to have missed is the fact that almost the whole gallery of characterisation in the book is a study of egoism: young Crossjay Patterne, Dr Corney, and the Ladies Eleanor and Isabel are the only exceptions. In this mordant unveiling of people seeking their own benefit and the gratification of personal desires, here is Dr Middleton looking out for his own ease and quiet and superlative port, and a great establishment for his daughter; the same ambitions, in other aspects, affect the valetudinarian Mr Dale; Lætitia Dale merely marries her shattered idol to obtain wealth and power; Willoughby's disloyal friend, the despicable De Craye, plots to rob him of his affianced wife; Vernon Whitford is selfishly immersed in his own studious ambitions, and does not show much solicitude for the cause of his cousin and benefactor, whom he criticises slightingly; Flitch longs only for the port and flesh-pots of the Hall kitchen; the aim of the great "ladies" is to gratify their love of meddling in other people's affairs and their love of gossip; and Clara Middleton is as complete an egoist as Willoughby himself. True, she has the grace to admit it at the end (*after* she has got her own way in every desire): truly does she say she was the Egoist, and needed purification by fire.

I do not subscribe to the general enthusiasm and admiration for Clara Middleton which places her as

"Meredith's most perfect heroine." If she be so, it is a strange reflection on his other admirable and true female creations, such as Rosamund Culling, Nesta Radnor, Cecilia Halkett, Ottilia, Sandra Belloni, Chloe, and Diana. A selfish, wayward girl, moody and unreasonable, never knowing her own mind; an undutiful and disobedient daughter; deceitful and prevaricating; ungrateful—even to Vernon Whitford when she dubs him a Triton ashore; she is always seeking her own mental and physical comfort, untruthful whenever occasion requires. And yet this is the perfect character described by the late Miss Hannah Lynch, in her study of Meredith, thus:

"In all fiction there is not another girl so enchanting and healthily intelligent as Clara Middleton—none described like her. In addition to the attractions of birth, breeding, and beauty . . . are those of . . . singular *good taste and tact*, and honesty of soul . . . *without any shabby tricks of mind or habit.*" [1]

The italics are mine. The fact is, the cold brilliance, the scintillating arts and crafts of *The Egoist* have blinded the partial critics to the irony that underlies the whole conception of the work. They perceive the beauty and youth, so artistically suggested, of Clara Middleton, the wit of De Craye, but they do not see that these and other prominent

[1] It is perhaps superfluous to regard Miss Lynch seriously as a critic, as it was this lady who committed herself, in reply to Mr Le Gallienne's suggestion that Mrs Berry, of *Richard Feverel*, would have been a feather in the cap of Dickens, to the egregious statement: "Doubtless, but that is not a compliment to Mr Meredith, for what would do honour to Dickens cannot be said to be worthy of him."

characters are as egotistical as Willoughby, and more contemptible than he, inasmuch as they lack his generosity and strength of will. Otherwise how could even Henley write: "Its characters, from Sir Willoughby downwards, are brilliantly right and sound; it has throughout the perfect good-breeding of high comedy." Perfect good breeding: Horace De Craye and Lady Busshe!

Dr Middleton often suggests an echo of Meredith's father-in-law, Thomas Love Peacock, with his scholarship, his fine taste in food and wine, and his love of ease and quiet. It is through the Doctor that Meredith pays his most anacreontic tribute to the King of Wines.[1]

In Lieutenant Patterne, the officer of Marines, Meredith vented another attempt at ridicule upon his uncle by marriage, S. B. Ellis; but that officer was now long dead, and the passing years had softened the bitterness he felt towards his relative. In *The Egoist* he freely acknowledges my grandfather's bravery, particularly in China, and there are several sentences like "Captain Patterne is as brave a man as ever lived. He's a hero!" But the Royal Marines are always brave and ready to save a desperate situation, *per mare per terram*, as their motto proclaims; consequently, Meredith's humours at the expense of that gallant Corps are a trifle obscure and can only be attributed to unfamiliarity with naval and military history.

Crossjay Patterne the younger, one of the most natural boys in all fiction—for he talks and acts like a boy, which is rarely the case in novels—was, as I previously mentioned, a very accurate picture of Meredith's first cousin, George Hasted Ellis, a

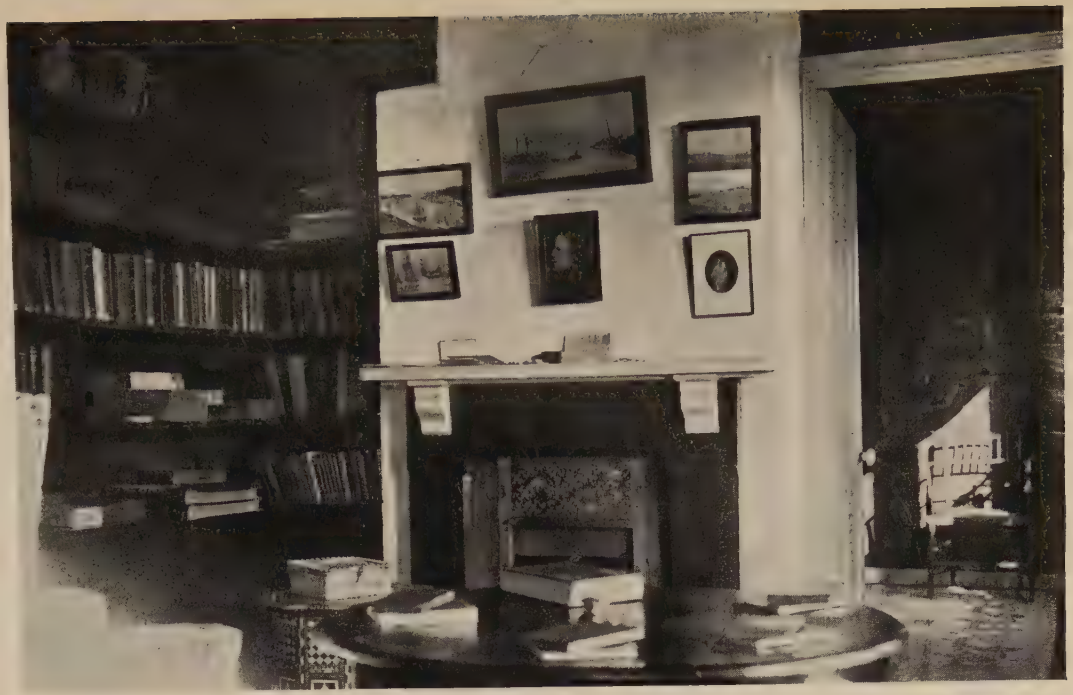
[1] Chapter xx.: "An Aged and a Great Wine."

troublesome, high-spirited lad. The young original, George Ellis, spent his boyhood at Stonehouse, which is part of Devonport (mentioned in the novel as Crossjay's home), and no doubt he and his brothers and sisters *were* "all hungry" there at times, for at that date the family of Sir S. B. Ellis were dependent on his pay as a captain. Owing to the inartistic haste with which *The Egoist* was concluded, Crossjay suddenly vanished from its pages; his future naval career was not adumbrated. But George Ellis duly entered the Royal Navy, and, after roving adventures in all parts of the world, eventually fought as a volunteer in the Southern Army during the American Civil War, when he was killed at the Battle of Bull's Run, in 1861.

The most interesting portrait in *The Egoist* is, of course, Vernon Whitford, drawn from Leslie Stephen, who, born in 1832, came to London from Cambridge in 1864, to follow a literary career. He was editor of *The Cornhill Magazine*, 1871-1882, and wrote the first volume, on Johnson, for the English Men of Letters series in 1878. He was also the first editor of *The Dictionary of National Biography*, 1882-1891. He married Thackeray's youngest daughter, Harriet, in 1867, and, after her death, in 1875, Miss Duckworth became his second wife. Leslie Stephen was always a redoubtable pedestrian. He walked from Cambridge to London, fifty miles, in twelve hours, and was a famous Alpine climber. His walking prowess is recorded in *The Egoist*, and it was in the autumn of the year the book was published (1879) that Stephen founded The Sunday Tramps. This was a pedestrian coterie which met every other Sunday from October to June, the walks taken being generally in Surrey,

Kent, and Hertfordshire. The original members included Lord Justice Romer, Sir Frederick Pollock, Sir Herbert Stephen, John Collier, R. B. (subsequently Lord) Haldane, Cotter Morison, D. MacColl of *The Athenæum*, and, of course, Leslie Stephen, who acted as leader. His was an "unlimited paternal despotism"; and when collecting his tramping flock at the railway station he had "the solicitous look of a schoolmaster." Meredith was a kind of ex-officio member. His health was beginning to fail now, and he was not able often to accomplish the full distances essayed by the Tramps, but whenever they came to his part of Surrey he would meet them at an appointed spot on the hills and escort them back to his house. After dinner at Flint Cottage the guests started for London by train at ten P.M. These pleasant excursions are often mentioned by Meredith. Thus he tells Stevenson, in June, 1880, that the party of Sunday Tramps comprised Morison, Frederick Pollock, Croom Robertson, Edgeworth, and Leslie Stephen. Meredith and his son met them at Dorking station, and all proceeded to Leith Hill, where they partook of a picnic, including Hock and cold sausages brought in a sack from Flint Cottage. He adds that Stephen had commemorated the outing in philosophic style.[1]

[1] *Peripatetics*, I. *Pall Mall Gazette*, 12th June, 1880. Leslie Stephen did not forget to refer to the cold sausages brought by Meredith: "The most brilliant passage in our annals was the discovery by our poet—for it need hardly be said that without poetry and philosophy one could never attain the essence of commonplace existence—of the singular harmony between lovely scenery and cold sausages." He goes on to speak of the view from Leith Hill: "In front of us rises the old mansion of the Evelyns, in such perfect harmony with its surroundings, that for the moment I feel myself a cavalier in spirit, and a loyal subject of Charles II. I look round instinctively for an oak-apple to stick in my



INTERIOR OF THE CHALET, SHOWING ALSO THE COMMUNICATING ROOM WHERE MEREDITH SLEPT
Photograph by Mr. Wood

The occasion of the Tramps' Centenary Walk was celebrated by a dinner at Flint Cottage. Professor James Sully, in his account of these meetings, says of Meredith :

"From his occasional participation in a part of the walk and still more, perhaps, from the readiness to fall in with our mood of playful lawlessness, we grew accustomed to regard him as one of ourselves. It seems to some of us now that we were never more penetrated with the essence of trampdom than when in one of those delightful summer evenings we sat and smoked after dinner in the Swiss Chalet above the Box Hill Cottage, and listened to our host as with exuberant force and brilliant wit he richly clothed our poor attempts to ridicule the ways of the over-serious." [1]

But the ever fleeting years and the toll of advancing age all too soon brought these pleasant walks and talks to an end both for Meredith and the founder of the Tramps. Leslie Stephen resigned, owing to reasons of health, from the leadership in 1891, but he sometimes joined the band up till 1895. After that he walked no more with them. Nothing can exceed the pathos of those last letters exchanged between Stephen and Meredith—those two mighty walkers of hill and dale in good days gone—when the former lay dying, and his friend, in hardly better case, weak and prostrate after long illness, wrote

hat." Albury suggested some inevitable humour at the expense of Martin F. Tupper, whose complacent "philosophy" has made him the butt of many gibes.

[1] *The Cornhill Magazine*, January, 1908. Meredith appreciated this article, which recalled happy days of a quarter of a century before, and wrote complimentarily to Professor Sully.

that they who had loved the motion of legs and the sweep of the winds had come to this pass.

Shortly before his death, in February, 1904, Stephen wrote to Meredith :

"My very dear Friend,—I must make the effort to write to you once more with my own hand. I cannot trust to anybody else to say how much I value your friendship, and I must send you a message, perhaps it may be my last, of my satisfaction and pride in thinking of your affection for me. Your last bunch of violets is deliciously scenting my prison house.

"Always your

"L. Stephen."

Thus passed the original of Vernon Whitford. The decline of Meredith's own health dated from the arduous work, day and night, which he forced upon himself in order to finish *The Egoist* rapidly. A visit to France in the late summer of 1879 did not re-establish his health. He left his family in Normandy, and crossed Touraine and the Cevennes country to Nîmes, and so to Marseilles and Bordighera, before proceeding to Dauphiné. He came back to England, and his mental and bodily state were not improved by the atmospheric conditions which greeted him.

It was one of the sad perversities of Meredith's life that the same cause, *The Egoist*, which brought to him success and appreciation should have sown the seeds of illness that was fated in his latter years to develop into chronic invalidism, and thereby rob him of what he loved best in life, the power of walking far in the English country-side and of

LESLIE STEPHEN. THE ORIGINAL OF VERNON WHITFORD IN "THE EGOIST"

From a contemporary photograph

mountain-rambling in the Alps. His complaint was bradypepsy engendered by the nervous excitement of prolonged literary composition. By the end of 1881 his spine was affected, and he began to lose the power of walking.

Despite his affected health, Meredith set to work upon *The Tragic Comedians* in the year following that of *The Egoist*, and arduous work too. He completed his term of " slavery " within the specified six months, for *The Tragic Comedians*—a short book for Meredith, it is true—was published in December, 1880, after the story had commenced an abbreviated serial appearance in *The Fortnightly Review* in October.[1] As usual, he felt dubious as to its reception.

It is scarcely necessary to say that *The Tragic Comedians* is based on the amazing history of Ferdinand Lassalle and Hélène von Dönniges—one of the great love stories of the world. And yet there was more of tragedy than love in the drama, for both the protagonists failed to rise to the crisis of their fate and, lacking entire devotion to the other's need, wasted the golden moments in futile procrastination and quixotic scruples of duty and honour. The motto for such as they, *amor vincit omnia*, was blotted out in blood. Their story is more startling and pathetic and dramatic than that of any invented novel or stage play.

Ferdinand Lassalle was a super-man. But, like Samson of old, he was brought to death by a woman. He, a Jew and a great potential force in the political future of Germany, met, and fell in love with at first sight, this young girl, Hélène von Dönniges,

[1] The original manuscript of fifteen chapters (the book contains nineteen) realised £220 at Sotheby's in 1910.

who was already engaged to a youthful Roumanian prince, Yanko von Racowitza. She was swept away by this new force which enveloped her. But the race and religion, the political views, and the past reputation of Lassalle were all abhorrent and anathema to the parents of the girl, and they refused violently to listen to even the idea of his becoming their son-in-law. At first, Hélène would have sacrificed everything for her lover. She fled from her home, came to Lassalle at his hotel, and if he had then grasped his fate firmly, all would have been well. But his wayward temperament suddenly shot forth egotistical and quixotic decisions. He, the super-man, would conquer the objections of the Dönniges family, and he, the past profligate, would wed a wife in the normal way out of her parents' house. So, he was capable of the incredible folly of sending the girl back to her home, and then employing as one of his intermediaries an old woman, the Countess Hatzfeldt, with whom he had had an affair in the past. This person now played a malign rôle in the drama somewhat akin to that of the Countess Platen in the great love tragedy of Königsmarck and Sophie Dorothea, wife of George I., which also ended in blood for the man and long remorseful years and bitter tears for the woman.

When Lassalle sent Hélène back to her parents he lost her for ever; he never saw her again. The Dönniges family refused to treat with him, and the father, a typical German officer, broke his daughter's spirit by confinement and methods of terrorism—even to physical violence. He actually compelled her, against her own will, to send letters of renunciation to her lover.

But he—Lassalle—now realised his folly too late,

and yet proceeded to an act of extreme folly. He had always been opposed to the practice of duelling: his lion-like nature placed him above the charge of physical cowardice. But in his baffled agony of mind he sent a challenge to Hélène's father, who refused it on the plea of age. But the challenge was taken up by Racowitza, her earlier lover. The two men met, and, by the most tragic irony of fate, Lassalle was mortally wounded by his boyish rival. He lingered in horrible agony for three days, and then the end.

Lassalle died on 31st August, 1864, and his slayer broke the news, with sobs, to Hélène: "He is dead." She had expected confidently that Racowitza would be the one to fall, and had resolved then to fly to Lassalle once more. But Fate denying this, she rose to the supreme height of Tragic-Comedy and a few months later married the man whose hands were stained with the blood of her lover. The outrageous union was of short duration, for Fate shot another bolt, Prince Yanko von Racowitza dying within five months. One need not apportion any blame to him in this amazing drama: he was merely a puppet ground beneath the juggernaut of the Eternal Feminine.

Thus far the story as known to Meredith and utilised by him. He did not live to learn the last act of his Tragic Comedy, which befitted what had been enacted throughout. The widowed Princess von Racowitza, hated by the populace as the cause of the death of the idolised Lassalle, and disinherited by her parents, became a female Ishmael and a nomad. She went on the stage, without much success, consoled herself with many lovers, and married a second husband, Siegwart Friedmann,

an actor. Divorce ended her connection with him five years later, and eventually she married a third husband in America, Baron Schewitsch, whose estates in Russia had been confiscated owing to his complicity with Nihilism. He and Hélène returned to Munich, and earned a precarious living by journalism.[1] The Baron died in October, 1911, and the dramatic Hélène, fearing to face the prospect of old age, loneliness, and poverty, ended her mortal career a few days later by means of poison. To the last, it is said, she retained the inscrutable, Mona Lisa type of face, and those wonderful masses of Titian-red hair which had brought so many men to ruin.

She was a profoundly interesting exemplar of (not to) her sex, and Meredith, with better health and inclination, might have achieved a greater study than he did in *The Tragic Comedians*. He did not allow himself sufficient time and scope to develop the characters of the protagonists, and the work suffers from the unusual fault in Meredith of being too short. Nevertheless, it needs must hold attention through the course of perusal, and there are many caustic sayings. Excellent is the vignette of Bismarck introduced in this work; and very apt the credo of the demagogue and unscrupulous politician, which might be professed to-day by some who have, unhappily, risen to supreme power in the destinies of England.

The Tragic Comedians reminds me of an amusing discussion I had, both verbally and by correspondence, with Sir Francis Burnand, who, although a friend of fifty years' standing, could never read much of Meredith's work. He took exception to

[1] The Princess von Racowitza wrote her own astonishing *Autobiography*. An English translation was published by Constable in 1910.

my statement in an article that Dickens and Meredith were "two of the most distinguished men in English literature." He said:

"No, emphatically, no, when Meredith is styled '*one of the most* . . .' He will eventually be nowhere near the high niche *where he placed himself*. Will he be above Peacock? He had not Peacock's originality of humour. But I forget we are bounded and limited by Dickens who, *when in his own line of romance*, stands alone. *Out of that line* even Dickens is not on a par with Jerrold, nor in *pure romance* can he equal Ainsworth (who was of his time)—I do not mention Thackeray—they stood quite apart. Thackeray gave us 'living pictures'—*real* men and *real* women. . . . Meredith's conceit killed him, or rather his work. . . . I wish you would pursue the subject, but whether worth while is questionable. *Your* method and style of treatment make me utter the wish. I have all Meredith's works but I can*not* read them with the exceptions mentioned. . . . Last night I made another *bonne volonté* trial attempt at reading *The Tragic Comedians*. *Impossible*—for *me* at least. I shall try another of G. M.'s: but I believe that, except with *Evan Harrington*, a poem or two, *Modern Love*, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, I shall find them *now*, as I found them *at first*, writ in a 'language not understanded of the people' and certainly not of *this* singular person signing himself,

Yours, F. C. BURNAND."

Thus the extensive gamut of Meredithian criticism from Burnand, who found him unreadable and conceited, to Stevenson, who aligned him with Shakspere and immortality.

CHAPTER XIII

"DIANA OF THE CROSSWAYS." DEATH OF MRS MEREDITH. THE LATER POEMS

THE Tragic Comedians finished, Meredith for some time devoted himself to his favourite muse, Poetry, though he well knew the scant rewards it would bring. The dreadful curse of Verse was on him, and had been for two months, he said in March, 1881. "Poetry comes easier than prose and bedevils me." The result of this particular bedevilment was made manifest in the spring of 1883, when Macmillan published *Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth.* The volume was inscribed to James Cotter Morison, and contained twelve poems and twenty-five sonnets. It included the famous *Woods of Westermain*, inspired by the poet's walks in Deerleap Woods, near Abinger, and also to a large extent by Norbury Park, renowned for its ancient trees and sylvan glory. Here, too, appeared Meredith's finest poem, *The Lark Ascending*, written in 1881, wherein he trod the heights with Shelley and as his compeer, both exquisitely singing the immanence of Nature in all things beautiful, the lark being but the symbol. The setting was, of course, the Box Hill Valley, just as *The Orchard and the Heath* suggests Ranmore Common.

In the same volume was the revised and extended version of *Love in the Valley* (reprinted from *Macmillan's Magazine*, October, 1878); and here, too, appeared *Phœbus with Admetus* with its stately

cadences and momentary pictures. Mrs Grant Allen told me that one of her most memorable experiences at Flint Cottage was when Meredith declaimed this poem in sonorous tones to a few friends assembled in his chalet.

Shortly before the volume appeared, the poet bitterly anticipated lack of appreciation once again, but it did more to bring him recognition as a poet than any of his previous or subsequent volumes of verse. *Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth* contains Meredith's best-known and oft-quoted poetry.

To revert a trifle chronologically, in 1882-1883 Meredith was a good deal in London, and went about and to the theatre more than was his usual custom. He saw Mrs Langtry in *Ours*, and Irving as Romeo. He liked Albani in *The Flying Dutchman*. At Browning's request he dined with the poet in July, 1883. A year earlier he had the pleasure of Robert Louis Stevenson's company at Box Hill again, when the two had several long after-dinner talks. Later this summer (1882) he went abroad. He crossed the Simplon and met his son Arthur at Stresa. They were a week together at Lugano. Thence they proceeded to Milan.

But he was now planning *Diana of the Crossways*. As early as December, 1881, he said he was in harness to his novel. He wrote to Leslie Stephen in September, 1882, at the time when there was a chance the new story might appear in *The Cornhill Magazine* (which project, however, was not realised), that he hoped to have it ready by the spring.

The work was destined to take him over a year longer than he anticipated.[1]

[1] Only about two-thirds of the story, twenty-six chapters, appeared in *The Fortnightly Review*, June to December, 1884.

Diana of the Crossways is, perhaps, the most psychological of Meredith's books. This was a very subtle study of the complex personality of his heroine,[1] and even the title of the story was allegorically apt. The character of Diana was mostly Meredith's creation, for her prototype, Mrs Norton, was erratic rather than complex, and it was her eventful life and not her mind that Meredith borrowed. She wouldn't be a bad heroine of romance, said Percy Dacier, derisively of the Romantic, after he had broken with Diana; and certainly Caroline Norton, if not a heroine in life, had a romantic career, tarnished though it was by dust from the sordid arenas of Grub Street, Politics, and the Law Courts.

Caroline Sheridan was an interesting example of the warring influences of heredity. Granddaughter of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, she inherited his literary talents and *espièglerie* and Irish carelessness; she had the good looks of her father, Tom Sheridan; she possessed the musical and artistic gifts of her Linley grandmother. It was her fate to have her name coupled with several notable men: her first husband, George Norton (a younger brother of the 3rd Lord Grantley), was the least remarkable of them. As early as 1828, when she was twenty years of age and a bride of but one year, there was some gossip in London about the frequent and lengthy visits the Honourable Mrs Norton paid to 27 Old Bond Street, to see her young and handsome literary adviser, William Harrison Ainsworth, who superintended the production of her first book of poems, *The Sorrows of Rosalie.* In 1836 came the famous case concerning her relations with the Premier,

[1] See the interesting exposition of Diana the author gave to Lady Ulrica Duncombe, in *Letters of George Meredith*, pp. 530-532, 542-543.

Lord Melbourne. The accused parties established their innocence; and it is possible that political conspiracy had some share in involving Melbourne in this scandal, which might well invalidate his influence in the counsels of the young female sovereign whose succession was imminent. Mrs Norton's resultant invidious and uncertain position, and her conflicts with her husband in the Law Courts and in print, tended much to ameliorate the laws and ancient conventions governing the social condition of women. In 1845 occurred the most painful incident of Mrs Norton's life, when she was charged by rumour with having sold to *The Times* a political secret concerning the immediate impending repeal of the Corn Laws—information supposed to have been confided to her by Sidney Herbert, who had just joined the Cabinet. The accusation was undoubtedly false, for it seems clear by later evidence that it was Lord Aberdeen who prematurely imparted the momentous intelligence to Delane, the editor of *The Times*, in the course of what is vulgarly called "a deal." Obtaining her long-desired marital freedom in 1875, when she became a widow, Mrs Norton, true to her illogical temperament, assumed the yoke again two years after, when she married Sir William Stirling-Maxwell, who, however, had been her faithful friend for many years. She died three months later, in June, 1877.

Such, in briefest outline, were the salient incidents of the stormy course of this lifelong victim of gossip, "The Byron of her Sex," as Mrs Norton's contemporaries regarded her; and it will be seen that Meredith followed rather closely the facts of her life in his story of *Diana of the Crossways*, with, of course, a good deal of author's licence and transposition of

dates and incidents. He commenced his work four years after her death.

As I mentioned in passing, when dealing with Copsham days in 1859-1860, Meredith had previously known Mrs Norton, then a woman of about fifty, as he met her at the house of his friends,the Duff Gordons, at Esher. Mrs Ross told me that Mrs Norton did not much care for the rising author of *Evan Harrington*, and this, perhaps, throws some light on what follows, for *Diana of the Crossways* recalls an echo of Meredith's life in earlier years. Copsham no doubt suggested the name of "Copsley," the estate of the Dunstanes so frequently mentioned and described in the story, though the actual house and its high situation seems like a picture of Denbies, near Dorking. Lady Dunstane was another presentment of Lady Duff Gordon, who was an enthusiastic defender of the character of her friend, Mrs Norton (always called "Aunt Carrie" by the daughter, Janet Duff Gordon); but the foolish Sir Lukin in no way resembled Sir Alexander Duff Gordon, who was a man of fine character. Most of the other personages of the novel could be fitted with prototypes; some are obvious, and it will suffice here to draw attention to the interesting fact that Arthur Rhodes was more or less an auto-portrait of Meredith himself in young manhood, the period of his life of which so little, unfortunately, is known. To establish the corollary, I must recall a little of what I have previously related in an earlier chapter.

When about eighteen, Meredith was articled to Mr Charnock, a solicitor; but the handsome boy disdained the law and gave his time and attention to the study of literature; to long rambles in Surrey

devoted to Nature worship; and to the cultivation of the society of literary people he met in the circle of Thomas Love Peacock. Soon after, he published his first volume of poems. Just so in *Diana of the Crossways* Arthur Rhodes was a young poet, rather good-looking, and well built. Diana said he had sent her a volume of verse. He was mad for literature. He was an articled clerk of Mr Braddock's. (A name which is almost an anagram of Charnock.) When Arthur Rhodes walked out from London to Copsley, he descanted with rapture on the beauties of Nature and of the woods he had seen on his way. When, later, Diana advised Arthur Rhodes to consider the prudence of his resuming the yoke of the Law, he laughed, and said he had some expectations of money to come. George Meredith about 1849 inherited a small legacy from a relative in Portsmouth. Arthur Rhodes, in his friendship with Diana, treasured her remarks.

Whether it is permissible to deduce from this that Mrs Norton had some influence upon Meredith's career is a matter for individual opinion. If it was so, then it is regrettable that he should have revived in *Diana of the Crossways* the scandalous accusation that charged his friend with betraying a political secret. To Mrs Norton's other and more staunch friends this matter in his book gave great offence. It very nearly caused a rift with the Duff Gordon family; but it was only subsequent to 1896 that the prefatory note was added to later editions of the novel stating that the charge in question was a calumny, and that Meredith's version of the story was to be read as fiction. This was done at the urgent insistence of Lord Dufferin and Ava, who informed Mrs Ross in that year:

" Meredith has promised to introduce an adequate refutation of the story he has so powerfully helped to promulgate into the next edition of *Diana of the Crossways*, so that I have had the pleasure of vindicating ' Aunt Carrie's ' memory of this atrocious accusation."

Much has been written and said about the impenetrability of the first chapter of this book. But as a matter of fact there is nothing very difficult in it. Inartistic it certainly is, and probably no other fine novel has such an unusual and untempting introduction, except *The Egoist* in a lesser degree. In brief, it is merely a review of the contemporary comments upon Mrs Norton to be found in the Greville and other memoirs, and a plea for philosophy in fiction. Incidentally it contains an apt and caustic *mot* on Charles Greville and his famous diary.

In addition to the forbidding introduction, there are many improbabilities in the story. The conversations are often on too pretentious a height both in the dining-room and in the servants' hall (Danvers, the lady's-maid, uses the word " invidious "); and the author's views on the emancipation and rights of women are introduced at a tangent, without much regard to the unities. But these are unimportant criticisms, and are forgotten in the appreciation that must ever be the meed of the major portion of this brilliant work. There are many memorable phrases within its pages.

But in his novels Meredith could also paint lasting pictures with a few vivid strokes. They stand out pre-eminently in this book and in memory after the reading—Redworth's November night ride to The

Crossways, the actual house being The Crossways Farm, near Abinger Hammer; Diana lighting the fire at The Crossways; Diana's night watch by the body of her dead friend; Diana on the wind-swept ebb-sands beyond Caen; the great scene of Diana's confession and parting with Dacier. And all through the story, like a musical motif, recurs Meredith's love for Surrey scenery and those wonderful flaming sunsets which gild the lily of that county's loveliness of hill and heath and woodland. With glowing colours he paints the well-known characteristics of the familiar scenery.

Ever his beloved South-West wind blows upon the exquisite scenes he pictures. Sometimes, as when Diana and Redworth walked to Selshall, the South-Wester dons the robes of rude force; but more often he is in gentle mood, as when Diana drove out with Lady Dunstane on a morning of June. The South-West winds and Surrey sunsets, great and worshipped symbols of Nature to Meredith, stir and irradiate the pages of *Diana of the Crossways*, the novel pre-eminently of Meredith's own county and cloudland.

Dedicated to Sir Frederick Pollock, one of The Sunday Tramps, and published in three volumes by Chapman and Hall early in 1885,[1] *Diana of the Crossways* received full recognition in the reviews without delay. That in *The Academy* for 28th February, written by James Ashcroft Noble, propounded Meredith as a brilliant social essayist paradoxically using the form of a novelist; W. E.

[1] The use of the copyright was for five years. See *First Editions of George Meredith*, by Luther Livingston, and *The Sphere*, 4th May, 1912, where Mr Shorter mentions the strained relations between Meredith and his publishers in 1893, which led soon after to a severance of their long association.

Henley, in *The Athenæum* of 14th March, compared Meredith's art with Shakspere's and ranked Diana with Rosalind; and Cosmo Monkhouse, in *The Saturday Review* of 21st March, declared that in Diana the author had created a living woman dowered with exceptional gifts of blood and brains. Nevertheless, in spite of these and other generous criticisms, Meredith preserved his usual attitude to the world and professed to believe that his latest work had met the fate of its predecessors and received appreciation only here and there from some friendly pen.

But he was in no mood to pay attention to reviews, favourable or the reverse, for his book had appeared just as his wife was struck down again by illness, this time to be fatal. After an operation in February, 1885, Mrs Meredith was removed to Avalon House, Upperton, Eastbourne, in April, and her husband was with her there on and off until she was brought back to Box Hill in June. All hope was now abandoned. For three months longer the sad and painful trial continued, until the end came, on 17th September. It was an irreparable loss. Meredith, after his son went to Normandy and his daughter to Mr John Morley's house at Wimbledon, was alone in the home of sad memories.

This was the time in which he wrote his beautiful poem, *A Faith on Trial*. At first, in sorrowful reminiscence, he recalls the past. He pictures his wife's early home in Normandy, and the happy days at Box Hill. So far Nature has been unable to blot the bitterness of his personal grief, but the sudden vision of beauty of the wild-cherry tree in flower[1] strikes a message of hope through the

[1] See also chap. xi. of *The Egoist*.

darkness. Now all is clear, despair is vanquished, and Faith in the ultimate good of all things restored. The rest of the poem is devoted to the profession of the Faith of the God of Nature, whose truths are unlocked by the handmaiden Earth. *Change in Recurrence* also voices Meredith's loss of his wife and his now empty home.

Many other poems, of this date too, reflect the poet's great sorrow, and his ultimate consolation, as in *Hymn to Colour*; and the epitaph *M. M.* (Marie Meredith) gives it final expression.

The poems we have been noticing, together with twenty-four additional pieces, including *The South-Wester* and *The Thrush in February*, appeared in the volume entitled *A Reading of Earth*, published by Macmillan in 1888. The same firm had issued the previous year Meredith's volume of verse, *Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life*, containing nineteen items. These books are characteristically alluded to by their author in a letter, to Mr George Stevenson, of February, 1887.

All through his life Meredith would have preferred to be a poet, and it was his poetry that he regarded as his best work. He told Mr Clodd:

"Chiefly by that in my poetry which emphasises the unity of life, the soul that breathes through the universe, do I wish to be remembered: for the spiritual is the eternal. Only a few read my verse, and yet it is that for which I care most. . . . I began with poetry and I shall finish with it."[1]

Mr W. S. Blunt relates that Meredith was much pleased when he said that he regarded him only as a poet.

[1] *The Fortnightly Review*, July, 1909.

But Meredith had to pay for his preference. Until 1896 his books of poetry were published at his own expense; and he would not have the later ones sent out for review. Meredith's least attractive poetry was written about 1892, the period of *The Empty Purse*, which the author himself, in later years, admitted to be prosy and didactic. He told Mrs Sturge Henderson so, in a letter of 1906. Even in 1892, however, there were poems that contained much of the old beauties of thought and imagery, such as *The Lesson of Grief*, *Night of Frost in May*, and *Breath of the Briar*.[1]

The curious production, *Jump-to-Glory Jane*, belongs to 1889, and by some is regarded as a burlesque on the methods of the Salvation Army, whose activities and persecutions were prominent at that date. It will be remembered that Meredith introduced a Salvationist, Matilda Pridden, in *One of our Conquerors*, written in 1890. The published version of *Jump-to-Glory Jane* differs very much from the original manuscript. The poem appeared first in *The Universal Review*, and to the editor, Harry Quilter, Meredith vouchsafed some "exposition" of *Jump-to-Glory Jane* which may be taken seriously or, more advisedly, as a typical example of intense and strained Meredithian humour at its slyest. He said it was a grave narration of events in English country life. Jane, though a jumping, was a thoughtful woman. She had discovered that the circulation of the blood is best brought about by continual exercise, conducing to happy sensations, which were to her as the being of angels in her frame. She had wistful eyes in a

[1] This book of verse seems to have sold well; hundreds of bound copies being all sold out.

touching but bony face. It might be a Satire, but it was a picture of England as well. Such were Mrs Girling and her followers, and the sensations of Jane, with her blood spinning with activity, warranted her feeling of exaltation.

Originally it was proposed that Linley Sambourne should illustrate *Jump-to-Glory Jane*, but he did not see his way to do so; then Bernard Partridge was engaged for the work, but, according to report, "his heart failed him" and he resigned the commission; eventually Laurence Housman executed some very fine and sympathetic designs, which were reproduced in the 1892 edition of this remarkable poem, dedicated to Meredith's friend, John Morley, by Mr Quilter, who also furnished a foreword on Meredith's "unpopularity."

Meredith's *Odes in Contribution to the Song of French History* belong to the year 1896. His object, he said, was to make History sing. The Odes were not published until 1898, when they appeared in *Cosmopolis* and in book form.

His last volume of verse, *A Reading of Life*, was published in 1901. This contained twenty-five poems, and among much that was harsh there sounded an echo of the poet's early and musical note from the past in the beautiful little *Song in the Songless*.

To revert briefly to the decade of the eighties. In August, 1886, Meredith had the pleasure of a visit, at Flint Cottage, from R. L. Stevenson. Although some of his older friends were passing, Meredith had new friends he much valued, one of the most intimate to the end being Mr Edward Clodd, whom he first met in 1884. He much appreciated the society of the Misses Lawrence and Mrs

Walter Palmer. Grant Allen and his wife, who were then living at Dorking, were always welcome at Flint Cottage. They introduced, on one occasion, William Watson, who, despite his article, *Fiction—Plethoric and Anæmic*, was welcomed graciously by Meredith. Various politicians also came to Box Hill: Haldane, Dillon, and, later, Mr Asquith. In April, 1887, Meredith dined with the Eighty Club, when he was introduced to Gladstone. In June, 1888, Meredith mentions an engagement to dine with Haldane and Asquith at the Blue Posts, sitting between A. J. Balfour and Morley.[1] In the following year Meredith attended several of the sittings of the Parnell Commission.

In the summer of 1887, he and his family stayed for a month at 4 Draycot Terrace, St Ives, Cornwall, where, in addition to fine scenery and good bathing, there was the pleasure of the society of the Leslie Stephens. The following summer he and his daughter went to Wales, where his son, W. M. Meredith, was then working as an electrical engineer, in partnership with Mr J. C. Howell, of Llanelly. Seventeen days were spent at Tenby, and subsequent halts were made at Llanelly, Llandilo, Llandrindod, and Brecon. Apart from the scenery, Meredith did not enjoy his sojourns in Welsh hotels.

At Ferndale, Meredith and the rest of his party went down a coal shaft, accompanied by the owner, Mr Frederick Davis, and Mr Frank Edwards, M.P. The novelist had some conversation with the miners below the surface.

1889 found him at work on *One of our Conquerors*.

[1] A little sketch of Meredith at this dinner, by Sir F. C. Gould, was reproduced twenty-one years later in *The Westminster Gazette*, 4th January, 1909.

Sir William Hardman died on 12th September, 1890, and the previous year Meredith had lost his other old friend and neighbour at Norbiton a quarter of a century before—Frederick Jones. He felt the snapping of these firmly forged and trusty links with the past. He wrote to Mrs Jones a finely expressed letter of sympathy.[1] Meredith could write very exquisitely in times of sorrow with real heart-felt words of sympathy, though he had the sensitive artist's horror of death and the grim ceremonies that follow it.

His son Arthur Meredith's death on 3rd September, 1890, preceded Sir William Hardman's by nine days.[2] It was a sad coincidence that the two personalities most intimately associated with the old days at Copsham should have passed almost together, and it must have struck poignantly the chords of memory. Perhaps his *Ode to Youth in Memory* was an expression of what Meredith felt in this retrospective time.

[1] Mrs Jones survived her husband for thirty years, and remained at Kingston Lodge until the end.

[2] Browning's funeral at Westminster Abbey, on 31st December, 1889, was one of the few services of this description that Meredith ever attended. He was also present at Tennyson's funeral in the same building in October, 1892.

CHAPTER XIV

"ONE OF OUR CONQUERORS." "LORD ORMONT AND HIS AMINTA." "THE AMAZING MARRIAGE"

THE decade 1885-1895 is supposed, popularly, to be the most "difficult" of Meredith's literary output: it was the period when he accomplished his literary vengeance on his critics, of whose hostile activities, as we have seen, he took a perversely exaggerated view. But now that he was financially independent, and had a considerable following both in America and England, as even he was constrained to admit, he resolved to flail those reviewing animals, or insects rather, who had bitten and tormented him in the wilderness. As an acknowledged literary force and influence, the critics would be obliged to wrestle with his verbal mystifications and perverse juggling with the English language, and to swallow the indigestible preliminaries of *Diana of the Crossways* and *One of our Conquerors* by way of *hors d'œuvre* before the meat he deigned to offer them was served. Such was the author's intention in his last, and so-called "difficult," novels. There is an interesting reference to one of these books, *One of our Conquerors*, in a late letter (1906) of Meredith's to a critic of his work.

When M. Photiadès visited Meredith in 1908, and spoke appreciatively of *One of our Conquerors*, he was complimented by the author for having ventured upon his most difficult book. Meredith went on to say:

"I had discovered at the start of my career that nothing upset the critics so much as anything that was out of the common and required an extra meed of attention. When I was about sixty, and I had inherited a small sum of money which made me independent, I took it into my head to serve these critics a strong dose of my most indigestible production. I presented to them, slyly, *Diana of the Crossways* and the novels which followed. But nothing drove them so crazy as *One of our Conquerors*. The poor fellows knew not what saint to call upon or how to give an account of the accursed volume. It was necessary to commence by understanding it, and these blind men were groping in the thickness of their shadows."

The critics must answer for themselves. One certainly, Mr J. M. Robertson, confessed: "With the exception of Zola's *La Terre*—hard reading for a different reason—*One of our Conquerors* was the hardest novel to read that I ever met with."[1]

Without in any way seeking to pose as a person who vanquishes difficulties admitted by more experienced critics, I may say that, personally, I find no difficulty in reading *One of our Conquerors*: on the contrary, owing to the extreme interest of the problem presented and the flow of incidents, regarded as a novel I find it easier to read than some of Meredith's earlier work, such as *Sandra Belloni*, where nothing in particular happens beyond the mental convolutions and consequent actions and reactions of the characters, whereas there is full store of dramatic happenings in *One of our Conquerors*, particularly at the close, and the final interview with Mrs Burman is astonishingly vivid.

[1] *Concerning Preciosity. The Yellow Book*, April, 1897.

Possibly the effect is gained by contrasting the intense emotions of the actors in the scene with the familiar setting, which Victor Radnor finds the same after the absence of long years : the white and gold furniture ; the scent of Maréchale ; the French clock, with the swinging gilt Cupid, which was always wrong as to time—as momentous and sinister a horologe as the French clock, with its alarmed ticking and cheerful brass group of the sacrifice of Iphigenia, appeared to Amelia, of *Vanity Fair*, when she found herself in the drawing-room of Osborne's house in Russell Square, another funereal mansion like Mrs Burman's in Regent's Park.

There is indeed a sort of Thackeray-London atmosphere throughout *One of our Conquerors*, permeated as it is by the odours of Armandine's superlative cookery and the sound of popping corks of Old Veuve. How picturesque is the opening scene, the view from London Bridge—" London's unrivalled mezzotint " ; and then the smoky splendours of sunset over Trafalgar Square in " The Walk Westward."

In contradistinction to *The Egoist*, the characters of *One of our Conquerors* are almost without exception lovable and delightful. Surely Nesta Radnor is the most charming of all Meredith's heroines. Though gifted with intellect and musical talent, she is ever an unaffected and affectionate girl—the symbol by whose acts and words Meredith expressed his noble compassion for women who have erred and suffered. Very real and human, too, are Victor Radnor and Nataly, the two Fenellans ; most amusing Skepsey, Beaves Urmsing, the Duvidney ladies and their disconcertingly perfumed lap-dog, Tasso. The unctuous parsons of the book,

the rival confessors of Tunbridge Wells, that Paradise of the Elect, and the Rev. Septimus Barmby, and the Rev. Groseman Buttermore, give another Thackeray touch, for they belong to the school of the Rev. Charles Honeyman. The character of Dartrey Fenellan may have been suggested by Colonel Frederick Burnaby, author of *The Ride to Khiva*, who was killed at Abu Klea in 1885. In Colney Durance, I imagine, Meredith provided a ventriloquist's doll who could enunciate his own satiric observations at the expense of England and the English; Durance's serial, *The Rival Tongues*, appeared in a magazine unappreciated and misunderstood, much in the manner accorded, in his own estimation, to Meredith's work in *The Fortnightly Review*. Certainly Durance speaks with the tongue of the Celtic Meredith as revealed in the letters of the latter when alluding to the English. Colney Durance utters many pungent sayings in the manner of Meredith's table-talk, as when he advises love as a cure for stoutness. Other typical Meredithian remarks are uttered by Victor Radnor.

In this book, too, Meredith tilted at his favourite windmill of the inefficient British Army; voiced his views on conscription and the scandal of young officers who, as soon as they were trained, resigned their commissions; and he alluded to the rank and file of the army as consumptive louts. All this, in view of recent history, now seems strangely out of date, and here, for once, Meredith was not a true prophet. But, as I have said before, depreciation always finds its mouthers in England, even from Downing Street with sneers at "kilometric advances" against "impenetrable barriers," and from Episcopal Palaces with rescripts announcing that never again

will *We* tolerate the spectacle of healthy young men serving as footmen or drapers' assistants. Perhaps: perhaps not. Anyway, the despised lackey and counter-jumper, who managed to fight all right for the protection of the spouters, decides for himself whether he resumes, or not, his former employment. He requires no direction or interference from those whose knowledge of battle and sudden death was confined to rides in motor cars behind the lines for purposes of exhortation, and to seeing from the windows of a special train "shrapnel bursting" over London—a spectacle not vouchsafed, it would seem, to other dwellers in the city.

Although a bishop might find confirmation of his views upon the young men of England in *One of our Conquerors*, he would also find speedy cause for corybantic commination at the sympathetic laxity expressed in the same book for breaches of the marriage law and the Seventh Commandment. The whole problem of the novel is concerned with those matters, and it was in *One of our Conquerors* that Meredith first adumbrated his quasi-humorous and much reprobated plea for "leasehold marriages" determinable by the contractors after a term of years if so desired.[1] Elsewhere he expressed his theory for marriages of ten years' duration more seriously, but probably he was still half in jest, so ineradicable always was the Comic Spirit within him.

One of our Conquerors has its faults, of course, like all other books. The extracts from Colney Durance's imaginary work, *The Rival Tongues*, are intolerably dull—to me, the dullest thing Meredith ever wrote; and it is curious that his sense of humour did not save him from making the villain of his story,

[1] Chapter xxiv.

Worrell, a Major. Wicked Baronets and Majors! Who shall ever compile the full list of you in fiction and drama and the indictment of your villainies for the entrapment of Female Virtue? And who were the progenitors of your long lines?

One of our Conquerors commenced a triple serial appearance in October, 1890, in *The Fortnightly Review*, *The Australasian*, and *The New York Sun*. It was published in three volumes by Chapman and Hall in 1891.[1] One of the few references to the story in Meredith's correspondence is contained in a letter, dated 16th June, 1891, to an admirer of the author living in Glasgow—Mr George Stevenson, who was dubbed "Glasgowgo."

Having declared war with the critics, the veteran set about preparing his next bomb for their confusing in the shape of *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*. But for those who have read Meredith in his literary progression, this book and *The Amazing Marriage* can have no difficulties.[2] Compared with the didactics of *Beauchamp's Career* and the subtleties of *The Egoist*, they are simple—tales merely of vagaries in the Holy Estate of Matrimony. Why Swinburne, for instance, could not read them is inexplicable. Perhaps the real objection to these books is not directed to any obscurity of plot or tortuosity of narrative, but rather to the perverse use of words and simile. This point of view has been very trenchantly expressed by Mr J. M. Robertson in his article, *Concerning Preciosity*, before mentioned:

[1] The original draft of the manuscript was entitled *A Conqueror in our Time*; 440 pages of this were sold for £260 at Sotheby's in 1910.

[2] Meredith himself seems to have regarded *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* as "easier" reading than *One of our Conquerors*, judging by a letter to C. K. Shorter, dated 25th May, 1891.

"It is indeed impossible for a reader who respects Mr Meredith's genius to read him—or at least his later works—without irritation at his extraordinary ill-usage of language. Old admirers, going back to his earlier works, never free from the sin of preciosity, recognise that there has been an almost continuous deterioration—the fatal law of all purposive preciosity. In the earlier novels there were at times signal beauties of phrase, sentences in which the strain towards utterance was transmuted into fire and radiance, sentences of the fine poet who underlay and even now underlies that ever-thickening crust of preciosity and verbal affectation. Even in *One of our Conquerors* there seemed, to the tolerant sense, to be still some gleams of the old flame flashing at long intervals through the scoriæ of unsmelted speech. But in *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* neither patience nor despair can discover in whole chapters aught but the lava and cinders of language. . . .[1] After a few chapters I no longer sought to read Mr Meredith. I made a hand-to-mouth précis of nearly every page, and soon got over the ground, only pausing at times to reassure myself that all was ill. Hardly once, so far as I have read, do we find an important sentence really well written; never a paragraph; for the perpetual grimace of expression, twisting the face of speech into every shape but those of beauty and repose, is in no sense admirable."

Mr Robertson showed no mercy to the famous "Marine Duet" chapter of *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*, which he said was merely "the imagination of a man who either never knew what swimming is

[1] John Payne, who styled Meredith "a cramp jargoneer," refers in his *Humoristica* to "the rollicking enjoyment with which the author of *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* disports himself among the ruins of his unfortunate native language."

or has forgotten what he knew. The occurrence, as related in the novel, is an impossible dream.[1] In this, indeed, there is pathos, and perhaps the ideal reader would only see pathos or literary picturesque in the kindred aberration of the novelist's prose."

For thirty-five years Meredith's female creations had been " swimming " metaphorically in his works, and now, according to this critic, when, at last, a lady takes to the water in reality and kicks out and splashes and swims for miles, talking the while, the whole thing is an impossibility. Meredith's fondness for the simile of a woman swimming is surely the most irritating of his recurrent affected phrases ; it can probably be found in every one of his stories, and even in *Love in the Valley* " she swims to me on tears," which suggests anything but a romantic experience and inclines to raise the spectacle of a damp nightmare. When Mrs Doria or Diana " swim " to the door or the tea-tray the mental picture conjured up is not graceful or dignified : one seems to see the ladies face downwards, kicking out their heels and sprawling on the floor. Only on one occasion do I find the expression tolerable, and that is when the Countess de Saldar " swam in the pleasure of a nobleman's compliment." Here we *can* picture the harassed dame, splashing about and diving and bobbing up again, and showing off, so to speak, during one of the few pleasant moments of that unlucky dinner at Beckley Court.

In *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* Meredith again attacked his favourite problem of a woman placed in an invidious and dubious position by some flaw in her matrimonial chains, though the thesis in this book that the heroine's marriage might be irregular

[1] The swimming scene was placed off Felixstowe, where Meredith used to stay, over forty years previously, with his first wife.

owing to the ceremony having been performed in a British Embassy abroad is not very convincing. Provided the necessary formalities had been carried out and an authorised clergyman or official had performed the service, a marriage in an embassy abroad, a place regarded as "British soil," should be as legal as any other, whether contracted in church or registry or drawing-room. Meredith seems to have based his presentment of the relations between Lord and Lady Ormont on the celebrated case of Charles Mordaunt, 3rd Earl of Peterborough (1658-1735), Admiral and General, who, after a stirring and stormy Service career, was supposed to have married Anastasia Robinson, the singer, in 1722. The lady quitted the stage and lived in a villa at Parson's Green provided by the Earl. Being very ill in 1735, and perhaps pricked by the recollection of the three capital crimes he owned to committing in his youth, Lord Peterborough at length acknowledged his wife and "remarried" her before his death in October, 1735.

But the characteristics of Lord Ormont were undoubtedly drawn from the Earl of Cardigan (1797-1868), the gallant leader of the Light Brigade of Cavalry at Balaklava, and the most popular hero of his time in England. He was very wealthy, and a noted duellist, his most notorious affair being that with Harvey Tuckett, whom he wounded, on Wimbledon Common, in 1840, as by that date duelling was going out of favour. In his later years Lord Cardigan was inclined to pose as an ignored hero. All this, it will be seen, coincides with the career of Lord Ormont, "our general of cavalry, whose charge at the head of fifteen hundred horse in the last great battle shattered the enemy's right wing, and gave

us the victory." Lord Ormont was married in the British Embassy at Madrid. Lord Cardigan's remarkable second marriage took place in 1858 at Gibraltar, and he and his beautiful bride (formerly Miss Adeline de Horsey) proceeded to Madrid. Like Aminta, Miss de Horsey had excited much comment when she rode in Hyde Park by the side of the Cavalry hero.[1] But the analogy collapses at the ridiculous ending of the book, where Lord Ormont, who throughout has been represented as a fire-eater and deadly duellist, not only fails to call out or horsewhip Weyburn, the "betrayer" of his wife, but actually and meekly arranges to send his young grand-nephew to the school conducted by this erring gentleman and lady, both so calmly oblivious of law and honour, living together in the Unholy Estate of Adultery. It seems impossible to believe that Meredith intended this farcical finale to be taken seriously, and yet there is no evidence that he ever alluded to it as a trap for the tripping of his loathed critics, which would seem the most reasonable explanation.

The character of Lady Charlotte Eglett, who presents admirably a certain type of arrogant but kind-hearted *grande dame* peculiar to the nineteenth century, is one of the most clearly depicted and humorous portraits in the Meredith gallery. She is said to have been suggested by Lady Caroline Maxse, who died in 1886.[2] As the mother of his intimate friend, Admiral Maxse, Meredith had often met her, and some confirmation of the supposition alluded to is provided by the fact that the name of

[1] Compare chap. xi. of *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*, and p. 99 of *My Recollections*, by the Countess of Cardigan.

[2] Meredith noted her strong character in his epitaph, *Lady C. M.*

Lady Caroline's grandson, Leo (Maxse), is bestowed upon Lady Charlotte's grandson in the book.

Although Lady Charlotte Eglett is an entirely successful creation, the same cannot be said of Aminta. One never quite sees the springs which govern her erratic actions or what causes her sudden mutations of conduct. Except on the principle that "the glory fades in possession," it is not clear why her hero-worship for Lord Ormont faded; and it is not clear why her original contempt for the scholastic profession, as exemplified in the person of the unheroical Matey Weyburn, should be transmuted into an ardent desire to share his duties in that sphere of work, and the world well lost, except on the plea of the instability and irrationality of the sex when caught in the toils of Cupid. It is curious that Meredith should have given his schoolmaster the name of Weyburn, which so nearly resembles in sound that of Wrayburn, the character in Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* who is so insulting and contemptuous to the schoolmaster, Bradley Headstone, and his calling, in that book. Matey Weyburn cuts but a poor figure as a hero when he escorts Aminta up from Steignton and hides from Morsfield in "The Jolly Cricketers" Inn—though the progressive incidents of the journey are very vivid and in Meredith's best narrative style, recalling the scenes of south-western high-roads and wayside taverns in *Evan Harrington* and *Harry Richmond*. Again in this book Meredith re-harped on his old theme of the invasion of this country and the supineness of the English to the possibility, but for once he paid the reprehensible islanders a few compliments by the mouth of Lord Ormont.[1] There

[1] Chapter iv.

are many mordant flashes in the old style of *Richard Feverel* in *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*.

By writing for nearly eight hours every day *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* was completed in 1893. It commenced to appear serially in *The Pall Mall Magazine*, December, 1893, and was published by Chapman and Hall, in three volumes, in 1894. The book was "Gratefully inscribed to George Buckston Browne, Surgeon" (a Dr Buxton figures in the story), who had very successfully performed an operation for stone upon Meredith in 1892. Mr Buckston Browne has given an account of his first meeting with the author:

"I had for some years wished to see or to know Mr George Meredith, and had often tried to imagine the personality of the author of *The Egoist* and *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, when one morning a letter came asking me to give him a professional appointment at my house. On June 20th, 1892, Mr Meredith plumped himself down in what has been called the victim's chair in my consulting-room. He was then sixty-four years old and ataxic, and literally threw himself into chairs or on to couches with alarming precipitancy. His first words were: 'Mr Browne, I am a writer,' and I was able to say at once: 'Mr Meredith, you need no introduction here,' and opening a bookcase immediately in front of him, I showed him a complete edition of his works. We became great friends. He gave me his entire confidence, and although exceedingly sensitive in every possible way, he proved an excellent patient."

As Meredith said of Buckston Browne, no victim of sharp instruments could be in skilfuller or kinder hands; "he is the ablest as well as one of the

best of men." Buckston Browne and his wife and daughter became the ever-welcome friends of Meredith at Box Hill; and the dedication of *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* to this distinguished surgeon ranks in literary and medical annals with Thackeray's tribute to Dr John Elliotson, to whom *Pendennis* was dedicated in recognition of "constant watchfulness and skill" during a severe illness of the author in 1849.

In February, 1892, the degree of LL.D. was conferred by St Andrews University on Meredith. His presence was waived owing to ill-health. On 4th October of this year his son, William Maxse Meredith, was married to Margaret (Daisy), daughter of Ralph Elliot, and granddaughter of Sir George Elliot, 1st Bart., M.P. for North Durham and Monmouth, and step-daughter of Colonel T. H. Lewin, of Parkhurst, Leith Hall.[1] The author's first grandchild, George Meredith the younger, was born in November, 1894.[2]

In April and May, 1893, Meredith sat to G. F. Watts, R.A., for the portrait presented by the artist to the nation. At first he refused Watts's request. But he relented, and the picture was painted.

In July, 1894, Meredith's only daughter, Marie Eveleen, was married to Henry Parkman Sturgis, of Givons, Leatherhead—not far distant from Box Hill, which was a happy mitigation of the sense of separation for the author now alone at Flint Cottage. He was still in full mental force, and engaged upon his last published novel, *The Amazing Marriage*.

[1] Her younger sister, Miss Mabel Elliot, was married the following year to Sir Alexander Mackenzie, K.C.S.I., late Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal.

[2] George William Lewin Meredith, now an officer in the 18th Hussars, served with distinction in the war and won the Military Cross.

This had been commenced, and then laid aside, fifteen years earlier. He told R. L. Stevenson, in 1879, he had done a quarter of *The Amazing Marriage*. In 1893 he resumed the story at the suggestion of his friend, Frederick Jameson (to whom it was fittingly dedicated). In January, 1895, he gave up his intention of being present at the first night of Irving's production of *King Arthur* owing to the pressure of his work.

The Amazing Marriage had a condensed serial appearance in *Scribner's Magazine* throughout 1895, and the complete work [1] was published the same year, in two volumes, by Constable and Co. The author's son, W. M. Meredith, had become a partner in that firm, who henceforth issued the reprints of Meredith's books, and published posthumously the work he left unfinished at his death.

Unfortunately R. L. Stevenson did not live to read *The Amazing Marriage*, in which he was much interested from the fact that the character of Gower Woodseer, in its earlier stages, was drawn from him. In an interesting letter to Meredith, written from Vailima, Samoa, on 17th April, 1894, Stevenson said:

[1] An early version of the manuscript of *The Amazing Marriage* was sold for £96 in 1910. The manuscript of the published version (lacking the first eight chapters), together with those of *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* and *Diana of the Crossways*, were given in his lifetime by Meredith to Frank Cole, for thirty years his gardener and faithful attendant, and one of the familiar institutions of Flint Cottage to the author's visitors. The gift was intended to provide future benefit for Cole, who accordingly, in 1909, disposed of the three manuscripts to Mr J. Pierpont Morgan for the sum of £800. With regard to the missing chapters of *The Amazing Marriage*, it is possible they were a sacrifice to Nicotine, for Meredith frequently used pages of his manuscripts as spills to light his cigars, which accounts for the generally incomplete state of his holograph work. Meredith presented copies of many of his books to Cole. One bears the inscription: "Frank Cole, from his friend, George Meredith. A good servant cancels the name of master. Dec. 19th, 1897."

"I hear we may soon expect *The Amazing Marriage*. You know how long, and with how much curiosity, I have looked forward to the book. Now, in so far as you have adhered to your intention, Gower Woodseer will be a family portrait, age twenty-five, of the highly respectable and slightly influential and fairly aged 'Tusitala.' You have not known that gentleman; console yourself he is not worth knowing. At the same time, my dear Meredith, he is very sincerely yours—for what he is worth, for the memories of old times, and in the expectation of many pleasures still to come. I suppose we shall never see each other again; flitting youths of the Lysaght[1] species may occasionally cover these unconscionable leagues and bear greetings to and fro. But we ourselves must be content to converse with an occasional sheet of notepaper, and I shall never see whether you have grown older, and you shall never deplore that Gower Woodseer should have declined into the pantaloon 'Tusitala.' It is perhaps better so. Let us continue to see each other as we were, and accept, my dear Meredith, my love and respect.

"ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON."

This letter was sadly prophetic, for Stevenson died eight months later, and a few days before *The Amazing Marriage* commenced in *Scribner's Magazine*. In his later development of the character of Gower Woodseer, as I have intimated, Meredith was not drawing upon his recollections of Stevenson.[2]

[1] Sidney R. Lysaght, author of *The Marplot*, who had recently presented a letter of introduction from Meredith. Stevenson much liked him.

[2] Further reference to the subject will be found in *The Sketch*, 27th November, 1895.

The character of Captain Kirby, the Old Buccaneer, was drawn from Captain Edward John Trelawny (1792-1881), the friend of Shelley and Byron. Several incidents in the life of Kirby were based on the experiences of Trelawny.[1]

In this last novel, Meredith reverts to the easier style of his earlier work, and it contains much of the spirit of *Evan Harrington* and *Harry Richmond*. Like those books, it is a novel of Meredith's own counties, Surrey and Hampshire, of English life. There are passages in it which recover the point of view that environed him in his boyhood at Portsmouth and near Petersfield when the nineteenth century was still young in its second quarter. Hindhead, Richmond, and many a spot in the south-west land beloved of Meredith come into this book. Lofty Croridge seems to be intended for Crowborough.

Apart from his trips abroad and visits to Seaford, to near Southampton, to Wales, and to East Anglia, it is a curious fact that Meredith's long life of eighty-one years was spent in that portion of England which may be roughly defined on the map by drawing a more or less straight line from Portsmouth to London with some slight divergencies right and left. From Portsmouth he went to school near Petersfield, and then (Neuwied intervening) to London. Thence to Weybridge, Lower Halliford, Esher and Copsham, Kingston, and finally Box Hill. This topographical definition of where he lived also comprises the topography of the novels and much of his poetry. Hampshire and Surrey are synonymous with Meredith primarily ; and in a lesser degree the places he

[1] See his *Adventures of a Younger Son*. One of the best portraits of Trelawny is that by Millais in *The North-West Passage*.

visited at home and abroad are all, as I have endeavoured to show throughout in this book, transcribed in his literary work, for Meredith ever drew faithfully from Nature both in the human and scenic sense.

Thus in *The Amazing Marriage* there are reflections of his visit to Wales a few years earlier, and tributes to the race he liked, in his later years, to identify himself with—owning to a considerable infusion of Welsh blood in the composition of him.[1] There is mention more than once of how the Welsh love their native mountains, seen or in exile. This book, indeed, is a pæan of mountains, for in addition to those of Wales, the heights of Germany and Styria are extolled. How beautiful is the picture of dawn in Carinthia's name-land.[2]

The Amazing Marriage and its two immediate predecessors form and complete the trilogy whereby Meredith voiced his sympathy for the wrongs of women, particularly for those who find themselves yoked to unsuitable partners and those who are —or rather were—debarred from realising their personalities and gifts in the world of endeavour and achievement. As he said to Lord Morley, he had been oppressed by the injustice done to women, the constraint put upon their natural aptitude, and their faculties, generally much to the degradation of the race.

In *The Amazing Marriage*, of course, the moral is conveyed with a Barrie-like touch of phantasy, for the two protagonists are bathed in a light that never was on sea or land. It is an impossible and delightful story, but if it is supposed to hold a mirror to Human Nature, it is as one of those warped freak

[1] Chapter xxviii. [2] Chapter iv.

glasses beloved of trippers in exhibitional "Halls of Mystery." The whole episode of The Amazing Baby belongs to the realm of French farce, and even granting the possibility of the cryptic matrimonial ladder left at the window of the inn, it is not clear how Lord Fleetwood came to use it, inasmuch as there is never a hint of his having returned from Canleys the first night or any other night. On the contrary, he is made to muse: of course, he could not return to her. How would she receive him? There was no salt in the thought of it; she was too submissive. To spring suddenly a joke of this kind —an infant born to a couple who separated on the day of their marriage—in the midst of what professes to be a normal novel may be an amusing literary harlequinade, but it has no pretence to claim consideration as literature or art. And one regrets this Jack-in-the-Box intrusion the more, because the problem of Fleetwood's reconciliation with his wife would have been of intense interest if treated seriously. Even as it is, when the improbabilities and absurdities of the story are put aside, there are moments when it is possible to be moved acutely by this tragedy of love—love that came too late on the man's side, love that had been killed in the woman. What a fine story it might have been: the pity of it. Fleetwood's character had great possibilities of development; a flood of suggestive tragedy is revealed in the passage which describes how love affected him.[1] Perhaps the final fate of Fleetwood as a monk was the right one for a man of his extreme temperament, and Meredith, with his insight into character, knew the consolations that the Roman Catholic faith can offer to an emotional and

[1] Chapter ix.

sensitive person who has suffered much in contact with the world, and who in return for the abnegation of free will finds peace in mystic symbolism.

Although *The Amazing Marriage* was Meredith's last complete novel, he left, at his death, an unfinished work, which was published posthumously in 1910 under the title of *Celt and Saxon*. The character of Richard Rockney was drawn from Frederick Greenwood. *Celt and Saxon* was another sympathetic study of the Welsh temperament in the person of Adiante, and of the Irish as represented by the three O'Donnells—the two races of which Meredith liked to consider himself a compound. There is, at times, a lightness of touch in this story, particularly in the delineation of Patrick O'Donnell and of Captain and Mrs Con, that reminds one of the later and subdued Lever, of the period of *The Barringtons* and *The Martins of Cro Martin*; and it is a pity that the original basis of the tale, the fate of Adiante and Philip, was never worked out. Instead, the author fell into the pit of his own digging and wandered in a morass of the most precious Meredithese, which reached high-mud mark in the tilting at the symbol of England, the long chapter "Of the Great Mr Bull."

Another fragment of a novel which it is much to be regretted Meredith never continued was *The Gentleman of Fifty and the Damsel of Nineteen*.[1] The six short chapters are very amusing, and the Vicar and Vicaress might have developed into most humorous creations, for she cast on him a look of a

[1] It will be found in vol. xxxiv., *Miscellaneous Prose*, Constable's Collected Edition of Meredith.

kind that makes matrimony terrific in the dreams of bachelors.

The scene of the story, Ickleworth, was no doubt intended for Mickleham, and perhaps the opening incident of the capsizing of the Vicar and his wife into the muddy river was suggested by a similar accident mentioned by Meredith in a letter to Mrs Walter Palmer, of 16th August, 1894.

The story of Louise de Riverolles promised to bear some resemblance to that of Renée in *Beauchamp's Career*, and the setting of it was in like manner placed in Normandy and Dauphiné.

Many pens have described the personal characteristics of Meredith in this decade of 1885-1895. Perhaps the most succinct and yet graphic portrait is that drawn by Mr Frank Harris :

" A most noble and inspiring personality, perhaps the widest and deepest mind born in England since Shakespeare. . . . I was astonished by the Greek beauty of his face set off by wavy silver hair and the extraordinary variety of ever-changing expression, astonished, too, by the high loud voice which he used in ordinary conversation, and by the quick-glancing eyes which never seemed to rest for a moment on any object, but flitted about curiously like a child's."

Meredith never spoke in the low, remote tone usual to deaf people. And as early as 1894 he suffered acutely from this affliction, for Lord Morley notes that year : " Found Meredith very deaf : he was less turbulent and strained than he used to be."

Mr Wilfrid Scawen Blunt relates in his *Diary*, 11th June, 1894, that he found Meredith " terribly

deaf and afflicted with creeping paralysis. . . . It does not, however, affect his mind, and he has a novel on hand at the present moment which keeps him writing six hours a day. He is a queer, voluble creature, with a play-acting voice."

Although his temper became milder in the latter years, Meredith preserved to the end his loud, drawling voice, mouthing his words in the manner now associated with Lord Dundreary, but which had been the prevailing habit of speech among gentlemen, particularly officers, in the days of his youth. And now the days of old age are come.

NOTE ON *LORD ORMONT AND HIS AMINTA*

Henry James also adversely criticised *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*. He wrote in August, 1894: "The unspeakable *Lord Ormont* . . . It fills me with a critical rage, an artistic fury, utterly blighting in me the indispensable principle of *respect*. . . . I am moved to declare that I doubt if any equal quantity of extravagant verbiage, of airs and graces, of phrases and attitudes, of obscurities and alembications, ever started less their subject, ever contributed less of a statement—told the reader less of what the reader needs to know . . . not a difficulty met, not a figure presented, not a scene constituted—not a dim shadow condensing once either into audible or into visible reality—making you hear for an instant the tap of its feet on the earth."

CHAPTER XV

THE LAST YEARS. DEATH

FOURTEEN years of Meredith's life remain, but I do not propose to describe them in full detail, as apart from the publication of his last volume of poetry, *A Reading of Life*, in 1901, and writing a few other poems, his literary work was done. He realised this himself, for he said in January, 1901, to Professor W. A. Knight, who had requested a contribution to *Pro Patria et Regina*, that he had nothing to offer him, as his present powers of production were exhausted.

To note briefly the interesting incidents of the author's last years. In May, 1895, Alphonse Daudet and Henry James paid a visit to Flint Cottage. In July he was induced by Mr Clodd to attend a meeting of the Omar Khayyám Club held at the Burford Bridge Hotel. Meredith's health did not permit him to be present at the dinner, but he came at the close, and was conducted by Mr C. K. Shorter to the seat of honour on the right-hand side of the chairman. It was in reply to Mr Clodd's words of welcome that Meredith made his maiden speech at this late hour of life, and in tribute to the sly and artful beguilement which had doubly drawn him from kennel or covert retirement and to "give tongue" this friend was ever after dubbed "Sir Reynard." A very interesting speech was made by Mr Thomas Hardy, who recalled the history of his first meeting with Meredith, in the rôle of Publisher's

Reader. George Gissing also spoke in similarly reminiscent vein of his meeting with Meredith in the office of Chapman and Hall.[1]

At this date (1895-1896) Meredith was still able to visit London occasionally, to attend a concert with his friends, the Misses Lawrence, or to go to Dr Plimmer at Sydenham, where he also had music. He also enjoyed the water-parties of Mrs Seymour Trower, who was styled "Lady BytheWey" and her husband "Gondolier," in memory of pleasant times on the Wey.

In the summers of 1896 and 1897 Meredith stayed with Lord and Lady Battersea at Overstrand, near Cromer. In 1898 his seventieth birthday was marked by the presentation of an address signed by thirty notable people, mostly writers, including J. M. Barrie, Austin Dobson, Thomas Hardy, Henry James, W. E. H. Lecky, and A. C. Swinburne. It was worded:

"Some comrades in letters who have long valued your work send you a cordial greeting upon your 70th birthday.

"You have attained the first rank in literature after many years of inadequate recognition. From first to last you have been true to yourself and have always aimed at the highest mark. We are rejoiced to know that merits once perceived by only a few are now appreciated by a wide and steadily growing circle. We wish you many years of life, during which you may continue to do good work, cheered by the consciousness of good work already achieved, and encouraged by the certainty of a hearty welcome from many sympathetic readers."

[1] See *ante*, p. 208-210.

Meredith in reply said :

"The recognition that I have always worked honestly to my best, coming from the men and women of highest distinction, touches me deeply. Pray let it be known to them how much they encourage and support me."

At the same time he said caustically and privately to Mr Clodd : "I know what they mean, kindly enough. Poor old devil, he *will* go on writing ; let us cheer him up. The old fire isn't quite out ; a stir of the poker may bring out a shoot of gas."

This tribute, and the fact that he was chosen to succeed Tennyson as President of the Society of Authors in 1892, should have convinced Meredith that he had no longer cause for complaint that he was unappreciated and unacknowledged in England. But he liked to preserve the little mental myth, and continued to describe himself as "an unpopular novelist and unaccepted poet."

He did not approve of the South African War, and perceived faults on both sides. He wrote to Hyndman in October, 1899, saying he condemned the cause. Further, in 1902, he addressed letters to *The Daily News* and *The Daily Mail* on the subject of Kritzinger's case, in which he pleaded for more humane treatment of the Boers.

In September, 1903, Meredith was very ill, and near to dying. Later, he stayed for several months with his daughter at Givons, and did not return to Flint Cottage until March. During this illness, a newspaper having stated that so critical was his condition that he only had "periods of partial consciousness," the veteran was roused to voice one

of his mordant claims to unimportance in England. He wired that the difficulty with him was to obtain unconsciousness.

This year (1904) Meredith's seventy-sixth birthday was marked by the fine sonnet addressed to him by Watts-Dunton:

> This time, dear friend—this time my birthday greeting
> Comes heavy of funeral tears—I think of you,
> And say, 'Tis evening with him—that is true—
> But evening bright as noon, if faster fleeting;
> Still he is spared—while Spring and Winter, meeting,
> Clasp hands around the roots 'neath frozen dew—
> To see the "Joy of Earth" break forth anew,
> And hear it on the hillside warbling, bleating.
> Love's remnant melts and melts; but if our days
> Are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, still,
> Still Winter has a sun—a sun whose rays
> Can set the young lamb dancing on the hill,
> And set the daisy, in the woodland ways,
> Dreaming of her who brings the daffodil.

In 1905, the Order of Merit was bestowed upon Meredith by King Edward VII. He could, of course, have had an hereditary title if he had so desired, but, as he said, he wished for no distinction. A title would have sunk him. A special concession excused him from attending at Buckingham Palace, although the King offered to receive him and bestow the decoration privately. Sir Arthur Ellis came down to Flint Cottage as the King's representative, and invested Meredith with the Order of Merit there in December, 1905.[1]

In July and August of this year Meredith had rented Alma Cottage, Aldeburgh, for the sake of

[1] Subsequently a portrait of Meredith by William Strang was executed, by order of the King, for the library at Windsor Castle, where it finds a place with the portraits of the other members of the Order of Merit.

GEORGE MEREDITH AT ALDEBURGH

Photograph by Mr. C. K. Shorter, reproduced by his permission and by courtesy of "The Bookman"

sea air and the society of his friend, Edward Clodd. He found the little town and flat Suffolk scenery as dull as Seaford had been fifty years agone, and wrote amusingly to his daughter about the unattractions of the place. Nevertheless, he returned to Aldeburgh the following summer, for the air was good and probably he had grown to like the drear yet fascinating marshlands of Suffolk which offer such vast expanse of sky, beautiful atmospheric effects, and splendid sunsets. But at Aldeburgh itself he still continued to gird, for his amusements were few.

Mr Clodd notes:

"When Meredith was last at Aldeburgh it was his delight to be wheeled to the ancient quay along which Crabbe had rolled the barrels of salt which were under his father's charge as collector of duties. . . . With a bunch of bladder-weed, plucked from the sodden timbers, and held to his nose as if fragrant as the choicest attar, he would watch John, the old ferryman, plying oars which he averred were dipped twice in the same water. 'I am certain,' he said, 'that there are Nereids under the keel to help the boat across.'"[1]

A pathetic contrast, this restricted, inactive life with the old days of great walks over the hills, and the soaring "beetle." But he still found pleasure in studying human nature, particularly as represented by elemental toilers, and John of Aldeburgh Ferry was to Meredith as the tinkers of Copsham Common he had delighted to converse with nearly half-a-century before, and the "Friendly Tramps" of *A Stave of Roving Tim*.

Meredith was now a confirmed invalid, and since

[1] *The Fortnightly Review*, July, 1909.

an accident in the autumn of 1905, when he slipped and broke his right leg, he could only move abroad in his bath-chair. The little procession of the author drawn by his donkey "Picnic," led by Cole, and Miss Nicholls (his faithful attendant) bringing up the rear, became a familiar sight at Box Hill. The favourite route was ever up the zigzag path to the summit of "our green hill," whence he could see the view which had delighted and inspired him for two-thirds of a long life. Owing to his difficulty of movement, it was found necessary to convert the dining-room at Flint Cottage into a bedroom for him after the accident in 1905. This put an end to entertaining his friends to luncheon or dinner, which hospitalities he had always warmly extended: but he was glad to see those who came. He often had visitors; earlier this year (1905) they included Haldane and Lloyd George. Rarely now was he able to enter the chalet where so much great work had been achieved, and during the last year of his life he did not do so at all. But he faced all his deprivations and losses, the sadness of old age, and approaching Death itself with calm resignation and unflinching bravery.

And yet, inevitably, there must have been some regret, as for him darker grew the valley, at parting with the fair glory and joys of earth and sky which he had loved and hymned all his life. Mountain and valley, sunset and starlit eve, the moon on a forest pool, woods aflame with autumn glory, the eternal miracle of the loveliness of spring, the song of birds, distant lightning quivering behind a cloud-rack on a hot summer's night, the threnody of the winds of winter sighing around the house firelit and warm, friends, a faithful dog, a kitten at play, wine

and books and flowers—no imaginative artist and lover of beauty can resign all these without a sigh of regret.

Two consolations were granted to Meredith in old age. His mind did not fail him and his heart remained young. His sympathies were ever with new movements for freedom and progress both in nations and individuals. The Franchise for Women was a cause that had his warm approval, though he, of course, like all other sane people, reprobated the absurd activities of the enthusiasts termed "Suffragettes," who injured and retarded their movement some years ago. Meredith addressed a long letter on the subject to the editor of *The Times*, dated 1st November, 1906; and a year before his death he further expressed his views to a well-known authoress, pointing out the error of the militant policy, with which he did not agree.[1] Quite in his last years, he, who had loved the motion of legs and the sweep of the winds in the days of active health, now found some compensation in the rapid motion and opposing wind of motoring, which he found conducive to good appetite and sleep. In the autumn of 1908, he motored in Sussex a good deal; and in his last letter but one, written a month before his death, he spoke of motoring over to Putney to see Watts-Dunton: but that was not to be.

Meredith's eightieth birthday, on 12th February, 1908, was celebrated by his friends and admirers with every demonstration of affection and respect. In the morning, after his usual pilgrimage up Box Hill, drawn in his chair by "Picnic," and accompanied on this occasion by Lady Edward Cecil (the daughter of his old friend, Maxse), Meredith re-

[1] As far back as 1876 he wrote his *Ballad of Fair Ladies in Revolt.*

ceived Mr and Mrs C. K. Shorter and Mr Edward Clodd, who came to present the congratulatory address signed by some two hundred and fifty representative names. It was worded:

"Many of your fellow-countrymen will join in felicitating you upon the health and happiness that are yours upon this your eightieth birthday. We desire on our own behalf to thank you for the splendid work in prose and poetry that we owe to your pen—to say how much we rejoice in the growing recognition of this work—and to thank you for the example you have set to the world of lofty ideals embodied not only in books but in life. Most heartily do we wish you a continuance of health and happiness."

The signatories included Thomas Hardy, A. C. Swinburne, Rudyard Kipling, John Morley, A. J. Balfour, Sir Edward Grey, Professor J. B. Bury, Holman Hunt, H. Beerbohm Tree, and Miss Ellen Terry.

In the afternoon, Mr Anthony Hope, Mr Herbert Trench, and Mr I. Zangwill arrived to present an address from the Society of Authors to their President. Meredith also received the representatives of various newspapers, and seems to have talked in an animated manner:

"He was sitting in an armchair between the fire and a window that looks on to his beloved Downs, surrounded by his books. On every table were dozens of telegrams of felicitation. In each corner of the room and out in the little hall were bouquets of flowers. A wonderful old leonine man, with a face like Hermes grown old, the long white hair

lying loosely about his ears, with a rug round his knees and his hand to his ear. . . . In repose the face took on an almost feminine grace of expression. When he spoke the deep, rich, resonant voice, and the animation of the countenance, seemed to give added stature to the aged frame. . . . In everything that concerned himself and the homage being paid to him on his birthday, Mr Meredith was characteristically modest. 'I have been climbing the stairs for eighty years,' he exclaimed, 'and I have done with the pulpit.'" [1]

But nevertheless he proceeded to express his views on the Suffrage for Women and universal military service. More interesting was his characteristic badinage about an imaginary novel to be called *The Benefactor of the Race*.

His eightieth birthday placed Meredith, for the first time in his career, in the centre of the public stage with a profusion of unwelcome limelight illuminating the privacy of his life and home. The newspapers seemed to be possessed by a belated epidemic of hero-worship for "The Sage of Box Hill." Leading articles and memoirs and "appreciations" of his work, written up by people quite unacquainted hitherto with their subject, appeared in bewildering confusion. "Interviews" with the great man were urgently desired, and so, as Mr J. A. Hammerton excellently put it:

"A motley crowd of reporters haunted the precincts of Box Hill, as keen as if a murder had been committed at Flint Cottage. . . . Photographers had been busy 'snapping' him when he came forth

[1] *The Daily Telegraph*, 13th February, 1908, which gives an excellent account of the day's proceedings.

in his donkey-chaise; pages of illustrations—most of them deplorable—were given in the papers . . . never, in sooth, was so much written and printed in the space of one week about any man who had not achieved the distinction of committing a singularly revolting crime. So magnificent a tribute to mere literary genius and intellectual greatness made one feel that the British press had taken leave of its senses."

Meredith, no doubt, regarded his week of fame in its right proportions; and despite the fact that he had lived to see himself described in flaring headlines as "The King of Novelists" and "The Last of the Great Victorians" and "Our Greatest Author," and so forth, he still continued to speak of himself as an unappreciated and unpopular writer. When M. Photiadès visited him at Box Hill in September, 1908, seven months after the clash of the birthday cymbals, Meredith said:

"The press has often treated me as a clown or a harlequin—yes, with the less deference, since my fellow-countrymen were not over-fond of me. . . . Certainly at this late hour they accord me a little glory; my name is famous, but no one reads my books. As for Englishmen, I put them to flight because I bore them to death. With regard to foreigners, I am but an illustrious unknown. . . . No one has bought my books—my novels or my poems."

And eight months before his death he said he had no claim to popularity in England.[1] These were

[1] See also letter of 19th February, 1909, to Herr Frey, in the published *Letters*.

certainly controvertible statements; but, as I have said, he chose to preserve this little illusion to the last.

He, of course, felt the fatigue and boredom of the vast correspondence the birthday celebration had entailed.

In his replies to tried and trusty friends his mind travelled back to old days in their company. To Sir Francis Burnand he wrote of those good times gone, and recalled the walks at Esher nearly fifty years back. And to Hyndman, too, he wrote of old times at Cambridge and musical evenings long past.

The aftermath of the birthday celebrations took the form of the Press seeking Meredith's views on every conceivable public question, which were duly published; it did not matter whether the subject was one on which he was qualified to speak or the reverse.

His last and eighty-first birthday, in 1909, was spent quietly. In the morning he took his usual drive up Box Hill, drawn by "Picnic," and attended by Miss Nicholls, and Cole, with his favourite dog "Sandie" barking a joyous accompaniment. In the afternoon the numerous congratulatory letters and telegrams received were read to him. In the evening his daughter and son and daughter in-law, together with Mr and Mrs J. M. Barrie, and Dr and Mrs Plimmer, dined with him. Mr Haldane had visited Flint Cottage the previous Sunday, and Lord Morley also came at this time. To him, almost the last survivor of his early intimate friends, Meredith said laughingly: "Going quickly down, no belief in future existence." But perhaps that negation of the future was his final mordant paradox, for

about this date, when another friend asked him what was his favourite extract from his own works, he quoted the lines from *The Thrush in February* telling that though the singer may pass there is the rapture of the forward view.

The singer was passing, but to the end his vigour of mind and love of Nature remained in full force—till the last long sigh. If he looked backward he had a long vista of years to retrace, marked by many regrets but many joys. He had spanned the whole of the Victorian Era. Born nine years before it commenced, he lived for eight years beyond its close.

Quietly the last months passed, and he saw and heard for the last time the magic of Spring. On Friday, 14th May, 1909, he went in his usual health for his customary drive. He contracted a chill, which was aggravated by going out again the next day—the last time he was to traverse Box Hill. He was taken seriously ill on the Sunday and, despite every attention, the action of the heart failed, though he was conscious almost to the end. His son and daughter, and his faithful attendant, Miss Nicholls, were with him. And he remembered his dog " Sandie " almost to the last.

With face to the dawn, George Meredith died on 18th May, 1909, at that early hour of the morning near dawn he had so exquisitely pictured in *Love in the Valley*.

He died in " green-winged spring," when the lovely surroundings of his home were clothed in their most beautiful vestments. There was an exceptional ecstasy of blossom that year in the Surrey gardens and lanes, lilac and laburnum and horse-chestnut and hawthorn blending with the glorious

GEORGE MEREDITH AND HIS DOG, SANDIE: THE DAILY DRIVE ON BOX HILL

Photograph by Bolak, and by courtesy of "The Bookman"

sunshine in harmonious blaze of colour to light the last journey of him whose credo was Nature, and who had been Nature's supreme Singer for sixty years.

It is needless to discuss here the illogical decision which denied to George Meredith's cremated ashes a resting-place in Westminster Abbey while at the same time it provided a memorial service there for this Naturist whose views were unorthodox to clerics of the Higher Criticism. Far better was it to bury him, as he wished, beside his second wife in Dorking Cemetery. "Sweeter the green grass turf than Abbey pavements," he said.

He rests in his own loved valley, guarded by Ranmore, Leith Hill, Norbury, and Box Hill. Rightly, Surrey holds Meredith in death as in life.

The following sonnet was one of the last things written by Watts-Dunton, and it is published for the first time here by the kind permission of Mrs Watts-Dunton and the executor.

TO GEORGE MEREDITH ON HIS LAST BIRTHDAY

THE Earth shines richer for each birthday, friend,
That dawns for you who sang *The Joy of Earth*
From that dear chalet which to her is worth
More than a lord of Χαναδυ dare spend,
And many a song where Wisdom's teachings blend
With smiles and tears of human sorrow and mirth;
And from this wintry couch of Spring's new birth
She bids her messenger, the lark, ascend.

"He found a fountain of immortal youth,"
She says, "when drinking at my well of Truth;
His Autumn days are rich in life's fine pith
That triumphs in the azure heaven of Art:
I send from chalices of my deep heart
Earth's blessing on her rare George Meredith."

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